

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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FEATURING

TROUBLE ON TITAN

A Gerry Carlyle Novel

By ARTHUR
K. BARNES

THRILLING
PUBLICATION

SLAVES OF THE LIFE RAY

A Startling Novelet
By ALFRED BESTER

SAVE
EARTH

HERCULES MUSCLES IN

A Pete Manx Novelet
By KELVIN KENT

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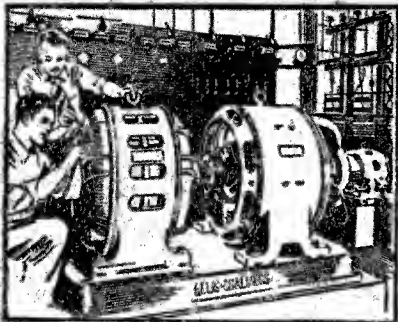
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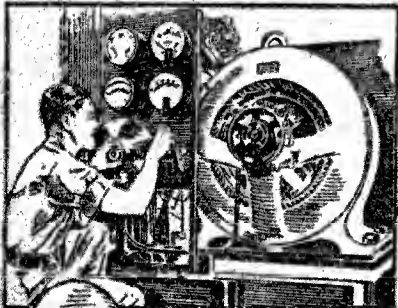
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The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction



Vol. XIX, No. 2
February, 1941

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The cover painting by Earl K. Bergery depicts a scene from Oscar J. Friend's story, **BLIND VICTORY**.

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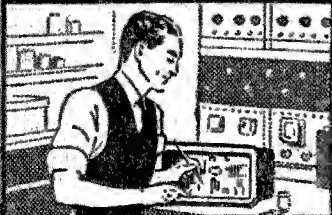
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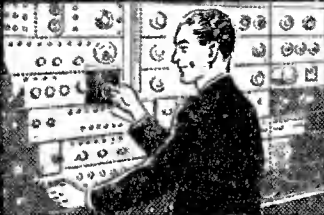
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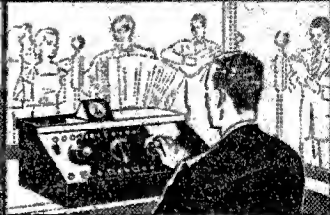
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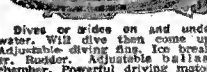
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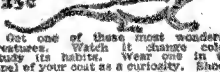
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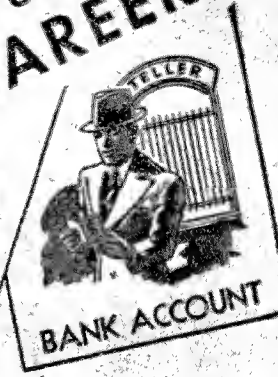
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The Reader Speaks



WELL, another month has rolled around on the old space-log—side-real or lunar, take your pick. It seems like just last week I was addressing this crew from the chief astrogator's cabin for the first time. Around and around on its axis and in the plane of the elliptic each planet spins.

That just goes to show what a dizzy wench Time is, anyhow. And, speaking of wenches, I mind the time I was temporarily out of a berth and was drinking my way through a hogshead of Nekkardin in that space port on Venus.

Yes, sir, that big Venusian blonde—er—ahem—about this month's mail and the yapping chorus:

Jumping Jupiter, how the sight of that mail bag warms the very ventricles of your old Sergeant Saturn's heart. I can almost feel the heat of some of those sizzling letters all the way through my space suit. And am I ready to spit on my hands and wade in! You armchair squirts, you said it! For I, like another chief pilot we've heard tell of, "like a good fight."

I said something about heat, didn't I? This first letter practically singed off my eyebrows when I opened it. Rocketeer Lester Cole, a scientifiction fan with four T.W.S. stars on his space suit, turns on the heat in his asbestos-lined communication. Does he radiate with blitzkrieg bolts for Arthur Barnes? Well, nobody can truthfully say we don't listen. Up and atom, Pilot Cole.

BRINGING CARLYLE BACK ALIVE

By Lester Cole

It's finally come! What I've wanted to say for a long time is going to be said in this letter. And I warn you, there's four years behind me. I really don't know where to start. Well, I can get one thing off my chest that has been annoying me.

I've kept my temper about this much too long now. Every one of your readers from about 14 to 12 always tells you his age and claims he's either your youngest or one of your youngest. I guess they think it will help them get their letter into print. They start their letters something on this order, "Being one of your youngest readers—etc." (I hate to make an example of Miss Myers but since she roots for G. C.—and I don't mean Gary Cooper!)

This is quite boring and it seems to me that there has been an over-abundance of young readers writing in. I don't mean to in-

sult them, since I'm one myself but it seems entirely unnecessary to write your age. But while we're on the subject, let me do a little bragging. I started reading T.W.S. in 1936. Just after it had changed into your hands, and at that time I was nine years old. I don't guarantee that I understand T.W.S. but I read it.

Now, into the Barnes-Arcier feud with all colors flying. How can Barnes compare Catcher-of-Tripterosaurs Carlyle with Mrs. Johnson? Gad, compared to that super-woman, Mrs. Johnson is living a perfectly sane and normal existence. And I don't care whether it's 500 years in the future—no woman could stand up under the charge of a Calsomgalomphitus without losing her nerve. (Pardon me, I forgot—Miss Carlyle has no nerves.) Anyway, I can remember the big kick I got in 1937 when Barnes wrote the first Carlyle story. Boy, was that corny! (Or should I say is?) I've been laughing ever since.

One thing in Barnes' favor, though, and that's Tony Quade, believe it or not! If I had my way, Nine Planets Pictures would fold and one of those Hyclops would get Miss Carlyle. And then we could have more of the Abbott Family. The Carlyle-Quade stories are well written but my sympathies are with Mr. Arcier. (Back me up, Mr. Arcier. Every Carlyle fan is going to be after my scalp as well as yours!)

And now, the business on hand with Mr. Carl H. (Holier-than-others) Anderson. I'm really amazed at you, Mr. Anderson. You go around yelling for a feud. Did you make that slip purposely, so somebody would start one with you? In the November issue, page 120—paragraph 12, you state: "Our Martian correspondent—nip blingo to him—speaking American for once, has lost ums pretty time machine." Apparently, Mr. Anderson, you don't like letters about time machines—Alan Saun's time machine, to be more direct. It all boils down to one thing. You think that section of his letter silly and trite. Right? Yet, in the August issue, page 120—paragraph 10, you write:

"Oh sad World! My kingdom (40 million acres of Venusian Swamp)—" This seems as silly and just about as trite. Oh, don't get me wrong, that business about the time machine was pretty bad. But it's no excuse for you to do the same thing.

As to the "Via" stories, I think they're all right. One suggestion, though. Why doesn't Giles write about the Martian Expedition No. 2 and Venus Expedition No. 2? They seem interesting, what little we do hear from them.

No need to say anything about Pete Manx. Just keep giving us his stories, and I for one will hold my peace. Would be nice if Pete

(Continued on page 11)

In this department we shall publish your opinions every month. After all, this is YOUR magazine, and it is edited for YOU. If a story in THRILLING WONDER STORIES fails to click with you, it is up to you to let us know about it. We welcome your letters whether they are complimentary or critical—or contain good old-fashioned brickbats! Write regularly! As many of your letters as possible will be printed herein. We cannot undertake to enter into private correspondence.

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* H. C. S., Calif.

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* S. E. A., Kansas City, Mo.

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I am happy to tell you that for four weeks I have been on the air over our local radio station. So thanks to your instruction for such a wonderful course.

* W. H. S., Alabama.



Surprised Friends

I want to say that my friends are greatly surprised at the different pieces I can already play. I am very happy to have chosen your method of learning.

* B. F., Bronx, N. Y.

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* A. O., Minn.

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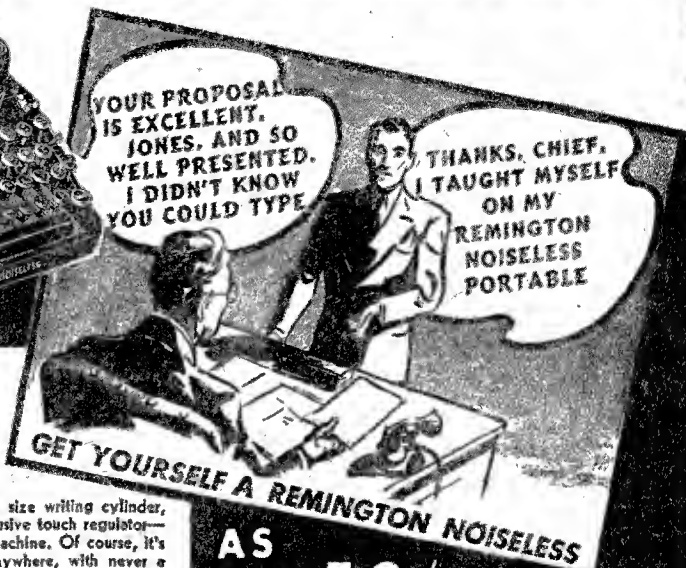
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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 8)

could travel into the future, or can it be done?

The best story in the November issue was "The Day To Come." "Tomb Of Time" was the second best and third was "Shall Stay These Couriers—" The reason that I put "Shall Stay These Couriers—" in front of "Via Catacombs" was that "Shall Stay These Couriers—" was about stamps and being a stamp collector, I took to it. Especially that section of the Scott Catalog for 2113. It's also the first story about stamps I've ever seen in T.W.S. or science fiction for that matter. Before I forget, how about printing a stamp on an envelope like you did in "Shall Stay These Couriers—" from each place that a certain story happens to take place in; for example, a 13 cent apple green stamp, upon which is shown on one side (the stamp is divided in half) the inventor of the rocket ship, and on the other, a rocket ship in flight. It might be surcharged, "10-23 Cents," the story taking place on 10. Of course, this idea is weak but it could be developed.

Also, tell Mr. Bergey that a Triceratops has three horns; two near his eyes and one on his snout. That monstrosity, on the cover, was not a Triceratops. Also tell him that Stegosaurus did not look like Gila Monsters and that Brontosaurus did not rear up on their hind legs and have teeth like a Tyrannosaur, if that thing on the cover was a Brontosaurus, and I have my doubts as to whether this is true. Other than this, the only thing wrong with the cover was four people, one Tyrannosaurus, one crystal, and two Pterodactyls.

My final complaint is that you don't give proper honor to Martin Alger who started the SPTPOBEMOTCOSEFP. Gad, those covers (?) —3300 Laguna Street, San Francisco.

Well, Mr. Barnes, Lester Cole's electronic barrage was shocking, eh, watt? Or were you insulated? Is Miss Carlyle's face Martian red!

Shooting stars, lad, but this old space-dog will bet you a food capsule against one of Saturn's Rings that you'll take to the Carlyle offering in this issue, TROUBLE ON TITAN, like a magnet takes to a meteor.

So Artist Bergey is off his orbit and doesn't know the difference between an archeopteryx and a cephalopoda? Cut your rockets, pal, we shall boil him in his own oils. Funny guy, that Bergey. He witnessed a space-crash the other day and when the sky-cop asked him for the license number of the strato-chariot, he said: "I'm afraid I've forgotten, but I remember that if it were multiplied by itself, the cube root of the product would be equal to the sum of the digits reversed!"

Now, I ask you—what can you do with a guy whose mind tracks in this fashion?

Spin my quinox and call me Twirly, if that stamp idea of yours isn't just the thing for our spacemails. What this planet needs is a good five-cent stamp, with b.e. monsters by Bergey painted on 'em in profile, eh?

Wait a minute . . . here's a sputtering fuse on a time-bomb that Space-rat Dann Heilman has sent in for Kelvin Kent. It's due to blast off in a trice-eratops—confound it. Pilot Cole's got me doing double talk now! Let's read this message before it blows up.

NO THANKS FOR MANX

By Dann Heilman

Gazooks, zounds, and ods bodkins! How much longer do we have to put up with Pete

(Continued on page 12)



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FREE BOOK

(Continued from page 11)

Manx? Personally, I have had enough! Sure, sure, I'll admit Kent was good when he had something to write about, but after all there's a limit to everything. I liked Roman Holiday, and A Comedy of Eras was fair, but it seems to me that Kent is trying to out-Manx himself. As far as I'm concerned Man About Time was the blade of dry grass that severed the humped quadruped's vertebrae! IT'S PUNK! Either Kent is getting lazy or his sense of humor has been sapped to nil. I am a very appreciative lover of humor, but I'll be darned if M. About T. even brought a sickly grin to my face. 'Tain't funny, McGee!!! Will some obliging person kindly deliver a lusty blow into Kent's personage below the belt on the nether side? Arouse him from his lethargy! Tell 'im if he has to write Manx, to place enough of that ingredient into his work which causes the proper muscular co-ordination of the human features which denotes un-suppressed enjoyment. Kill us, Kent! (With humor.)

Congrats to Bergey for his Oct. cover. Congrats to Murphy, Paul, and Wesso. Tell 'em to keep up the good work. Whenever you're in doubt, Ed, use Paul. He is a never-ending supply of undeniably superb picturization. He is beyond a doubt the essence of genius in his composing perfection and priceless characterization of bizarre beasts and beings of Beyond. In other words, he's PAUL. I can truthfully say that my eyes have never observed a Paul illustration which failed to satisfy.

Your stories, on an average, are very good. Let's have many, many more of Giles' "Via" stories. Stories will also go good by Kuttner, Binder, and that undeniably ingenious author, Mr. Ross Rocklynne.—7063 Ohio Ave., Silverton, O.

So you want to die—laughing, eh, space pal? Well, we shall load Kelvin Kent's oxygen helmet with more than one whiff of nitrous oxide. And after partaking of all that laughing gas the old gent had better tickle our funny-bones from now on, or we'll send Fete Manx back to making mudpies in the Paleozoic Epoch—and leave him there for keeps. Blow me into the eighth dimension, Pilot Heilman, if you're not right for demanding more scientifun and non-sc(i)ence.

All jesting aside, Helmsman Heilman, focus your microscope on THE GREEKS HAD A WAR FOR IT in this issue and let me know if you can slip the old Sergeant a kind word about the yarn.

Well, strip my gears and call me Shiftless if we haven't got time on our hands once more! It's a spacegram S.O.S. from Space-vet Alan Saun, and he's lost his time machine.

LOST AND FOUND

By Alan Saun

Many, many thanks to Mr. E. Earl Bliefeldt of Thornton, Ill., for his friendly, well meaning letter in the November, 1940, issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Reading the part meant for me with special interest, I began feeling increasingly relieved.

"At last!" I cried joyfully to myself, as, magazine in hand, I ceased pacing my spacious laboratory. "At long last I am about to find out just what became of my beloved time machine! Oh joy supreme!"

But reading on, I was doomed to heart-sick disappointment. For I was soon to realize that Mr. Bliefeldt's letter had nothing to do with me. I'll explain.

First of all, his description of the odd looking machine he saw with the aid of his Temporascaner—a clever invention I should have

long ago thought up myself, what with me being so undeniably brilliant—in no way describes mine.

My invention is a large, dull ball, about ten feet in diameter. Dark-blue in color, it contains one small, circular door, and rests securely on a short, saucer-shaped table of tremendous strength. True, it sadly lacks an impressive appearance, but what an invention it is—er—was, rather. What an invention!

There is one thing, however, which proves beyond a shadow of doubt that the modernly dressed gentleman Mr. Bielfeldt saw in the ultramodern office of the year 3754, was not Professor M. T. Head. When excited, the professor does get a wild look in his eye. That I shall not deny. But it is the right one, Mr. Bielfeldt, not the left.

Well, once more greatly disappointed, I again beg the readers of T.W.S. to inform me, if they really know, the whereabouts of my beloved super-invention—my time machine.

And—oh yes. I looked behind that pile of adjectives my observing friend, Mr. Carl H. Anderson, so kindly suggested. No—my lost time machine wasn't there at all, but instead a neatly folded note addressed to me. It read: My dear Mr. Saun:

Beware! That man from Petoskey, Michigan, is extremely fond of feuds as he once openly confessed in a rather bombastic letter in a certain magazine you both read. Don't, I beg of you, allow this heckler to provoke you into starting one. Ignore him completely.

(Signed) Anonymous

Could this letter have been left there by the vanished professor?

I would like to clear up one thing, however. When I stated that the April, 1939, issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES contained a letter of mine—the first one—I didn't mean the first letter I had ever sent to that magazine. I meant that mine was the first letter of the department. The Reader Speaks.

Before signing off, I wish to make known that the November, 1940, issue, as far as I am concerned, was by no means a disappointing one. As usual, it was grand. Keep up the good work.—Toronto, Canada.

We'll be calling all rocketeers, Spacebird Saun, and you can be sure that one of our gimlet-eyed crew will find your elusive time machine quicker'n you can peel a meteor. Make it a good reward, lad, and I'll join in the hunt for your vanishing vehicle myself.

And here's a six-blast space-gun salute and a handful of Venusian orchids from Charles Hidley. Cut in your radiophones on this.

CALLING HOLLYWOOD

By Charles Hidley

Hamilton's "Gift from the Stars" is just that; a clever and humorous yarn that would be ideal for the movies. Oh, if only I could influence some producer! The Murphy pics are the best he has done to date. A light stf. story is a relief. No. 2 is "The Life Machines," something I've been longing for and very reminiscent of the days of "Electropolis" and "Paradise and Iron"; the latter Breuer epic reminds me that both the cover and illustration for Wellman's novelet were poor and also to wonder why Wesso does not draw as he did ten years ago for that P. and L. book.

"The Golden Barrier" is equally fine, but because ties are unfair, I had to make this one number three. Aside from Murphy's two, it had the only good illustration in the issue. Glad to see Saaty back, though, and Marchioni and Schomburg, too.

The conclusion of the Mercury jaunt is fourth. Giles has endowed upon these classics an aura of reality that makes the first interplanetary "histories" deserve that name—scientific classics. May that brave crew never fall in their spectacular—Giles makes it sound like every-day work—flights and explorations.

(Continued on page 120)

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"I will teach you Finger Print Identification—Firearms Identification—Police Photography—and Secret Service!" That's what I told the men who now handle the good jobs listed in the column at the right. Give me a chance and I'll train YOU to fill an important position in the fascinating field of scientific crime detection.



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47% of ALL Identification Bureaus in the United States are headed by our students and graduates. They have regular jobs—salaries—often collect reward money—and many of these men knew absolutely nothing about this work before they began their training with me.

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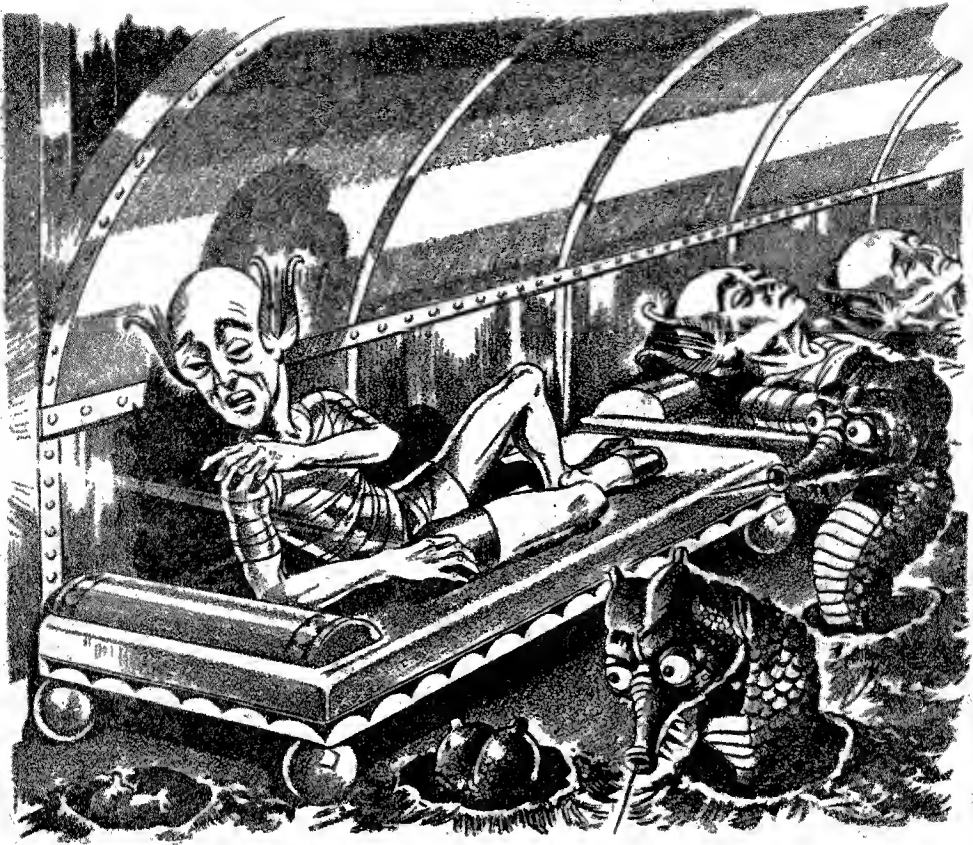
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When the Queen of the Spaceways Meets the King of the Interplanetary Wilds, There's a Checkmate in the Stalking of Saturn's Most Dangerous Game!



Gerry drilled it twice and the monster crashed against the wall and collapsed



The Titanian stirred restlessly and raised himself on one elbow

TROUBLE ON TITAN

By **ARTHUR K. BARNES**

Author of "Waters of Wrath," "Satellite Five," etc.

CHAPTER I

Snaring a Trapper

THE conference was not going well.

It was taking place in the New York offices of the London Interplanetary Zoo, on the top floor of the tremendous Walker Building. The suite was built of the finest modern materials and equipped with all the comforts science could devise. Vacuum-brik walls shut out noise. There were mineral fluff insulation. Martian sound-ab-

sorbent rugs, plastic body-contour furniture, air conditioning. The press of a button brought iced drinks or lighted cigarettes of aromatic Venusian tobaccos through a recess in one wall.

Despite all these comforts, the visitor was having a bad time.

At one end of the room was a small screen. On a stand before it was the morning "newspaper," consisting of a tiny roll of film. Subscribers could turn on the latest news at any time by simply flashing it onto the screen. A dial enabled the reader to flip through the entire "paper" with a twist or two.

A Complete Gerry Carlyle Novel

Vari-colored backgrounds—white for local news, green for foreign, yellow for sports, and so on—made it easy for the reader to turn to any desired section.

Right now it was turned to the pale violet interplanetary page.

GERRY CARLYLE CHALLENGED IN RACE TO SATURN

London Zoo Contract at Stake

As Prize for Victor

N. Y. Sept. 4.—UP—Scientific circles stirred with interest today as the supremacy of Gerry "Catch-'em-Alive" Carlyle in the role of interplanetary trapper—the rigorous profession of capturing monstrous life-forms on our neighboring planets and returning with them alive for exhibition in Earthly zoos—was challenged by Prof. Erasmus Kurtt.

Miss Carlyle's contract with the London Interplanetary Zoo comes up for renewal soon. Prof. Kurtt suggested that so important a position should be given only to the one most fitted to hold it.

Intimating that he considered himself the better "man," Kurtt proposed a race with the rich L.I.Z. contract as the prize.

The contest would be decided on the basis of a journey to any designated planet, the capture of any designated monster thereon, and safe return to Earth under the racer's own power. First home with the creature alive and well would be declared the winner.

Prof. Kurtt suggested that the planet Saturn would afford sufficient difficulties to test the mettle of the contestants.

Speculation was rife. . . .

The news item was switched off sharply, coincident with a sound suspiciously like a feminine snort. Claude Weatherby, public relations director for the London Interplanetary Zoo, mopped his brow furtively. He felt that he would rather contend with the tantrums of any of the world's greatest collection of planetary monstrosities than with Gerry Carlyle's famous temperament.

GERRY was in an uncompromising mood. It was apparent in the set of her shoulders, the swing of her arms as she paced the office floor. Undoubtedly one of the most famous women in the world, she was also among its most beautiful. But hers was the beauty, not of the aloof Grecian goddess, but of the jungle tigress. Underneath its alluring curves, her body was tough, resilient, inured to hardship and battle. She could be softly feminine on occasion. But

also, like the jungle cat, she could be dangerous.

Starting her career as a girl still in her teens, Gerry Carlyle had fought her way to the top of the most exacting of all professions. Success was not won by resort to feminine stratagem, nor by use of her amazing beauty. Gerry scorned such wiles. In a man's world, she competed with men on their own terms. Her success was due to hard work, brains, courage, and the overwhelming effect of her forceful personality.

"Captured by Gerry Carlyle," the well known legend on so many of the tanks and glass cages at the London Zoo, was a symbol of what may be achieved by grit and enterprise in a democratic world.

Visibly drawing upon his nerve, Weatherby tentatively resumed an argument.

"After all, my dear, it's only a publicity stunt. We appreciate that you are the outstanding personage in the business. Please be assured of that. We would never have consented to the race if we hadn't had absolute faith in your ability to defeat this fellow Kurtt."

"I understand all that," Gerry said coldly.

"Perhaps we should have consulted you before barging ahead with plans for a jolly send-off ceremony with you and Kurtt. But, really, we were confident that your famous sportsmanship—"

"Spare me the crude flattery, Claude. You haven't told me all the circumstances surrounding this silly challenge. I like honesty. I make a point of being straightforward. Why don't you?"

Weatherby crimsoned and began to splutter. Gerry stopped him short with an imperiously unpraised hand.

"Here are the facts. The planetary hunters, of whom I am one, can be counted on your fingers. Another two or three, Claude, and you'd have to take off your shoes to count them. We form probably the most exclusive little coterie anywhere in the Solar System. The chance of anyone's possessing all the qualifications to become a successful trapper of monsters is literally one in millions.

"Now this fellow Kurtt—he's no

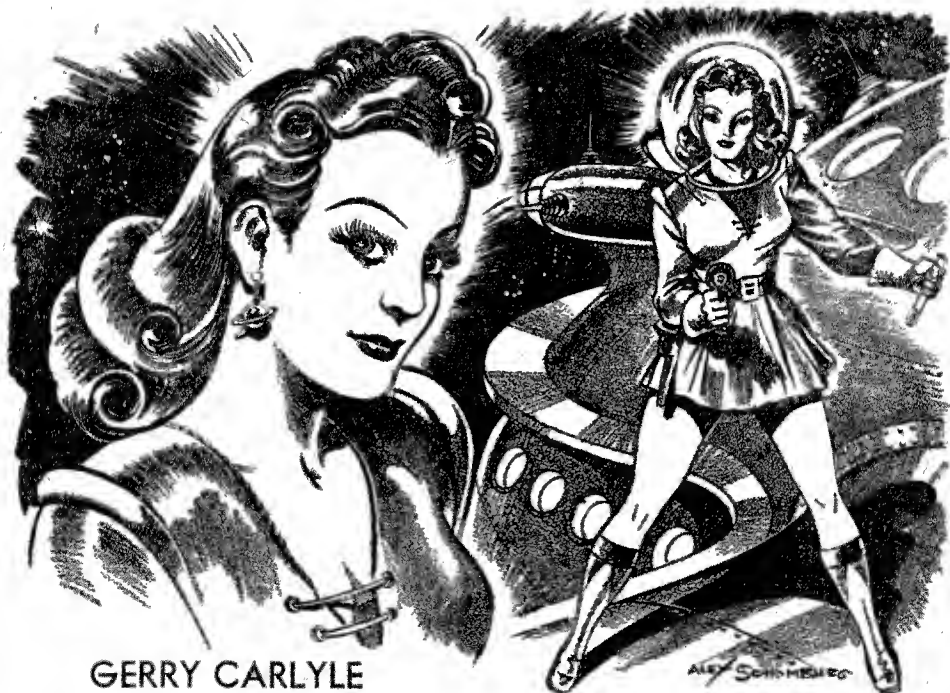
more a professor than you are—is definitely not one of us. He's a small-time, penny ante hanger-on, chiseling a few dollars by talking some sucker into financing him for short trips. There are two unexplained things. In the first place, none of the genuine hunters would have the appalling lack of ethics to try snaffling a fellow-member's job. It just isn't done.

"A man like Kurtt wouldn't dare suggest such a thing. He hasn't the—er—courage. Unless, of course, someone important egged him on. And secondly, where on Earth would a phony like

WEATHERBY and the girl glanced at an easy chair in the corner. Barely visible were a pair of muscular, booted legs draped over the chair arm, and a cloud of pipe smoke. When it dissipated, the ruggedly good-looking face of Captain Tommy Strike, Gerry's fiancé, grinned sourly at them. "Look, Claude," he explained. "What Gerry is asking, in her quaint way, is who's backing Kurtt?"

Weatherby hemmed and hawed, his British tact quite unequal to the task.

"Fact is—uh—we—ah—didn't realize ourselves who was behind Kurtt till



GERRY CARLYLE

Kurtt get the financing? This is big business, Claude, as you well know. The returns of a successful trip of mine may run close to a million dollars a year for the L.I.Z. But it also costs hundreds of thousands to carry out an expedition.

"As for the race—against Hallek or Moore or one of the others it would be fun. But to associate with a man of Kurtt's unsavory reputation is harmful to me and the Zoo. The whole thing—er—"

"It certainly doesn't smell good," interpolated a third voice.

after we'd agreed on the—uh—bally publicity stunt. The man behind—"

His voice petered out entirely. Gerry Carlyle gazed with rising consternation at Weatherby.

"Claude!" she cried. "You don't mean to say— It can't possibly be that horror from Hollywood on the Moon. Not Von Zorn again!"

"Well—" Weatherby made a defeated gesture and hunched his shoulders like a man about to be overwhelmed by a storm.

Gerry groaned in mortal anguish. Of all people in the system to be in her

hair again. Von Zorn, czar of the motion picture business, was positively the least welcome. The feud between these two for the past few years had raged from Mercury to Jupiter, with skirmishes on the Moon, Venus, Almusen's Comet, and various wayside battlegrounds. It had convulsed the System with delight.

With Gerry, it was the matter of an ideal. She took it as a personal insult when Von Zorn's clever young technicians synthesized, for motion picture consumption, robot-controlled planetary monsters instead of using the real thing. She always loved to unload a roaring cargo of the genuine article just in time to show up the menace in *Nine Planets Pictures'* latest action epic as the wire and *papier maché* creations they really were.

With Von Zorn, it was a matter of box office. There was no percentage in making high-budget films when Gerry was constantly turning them into low-gross productions by her genuine attractions at the L.I.Z.

By vigorously pacing across the room and back, Gerry tried to reduce her head of steam.

"So!" she finally burst out, and the syllable was like the bursting of an atomic bomb. "Old monkey-face hasn't had enough, eh? Still whetting his knife in case I turn my back. Thinks he'll run me out of business. Put one of his stooges in my place so he can dictate to the Zoo the way he dictates to those poor, deluded devils at Hollywood on the Moon!"

Weatherby and Strike sprang to their feet, ready to duck or run, as the emergency might indicate.

"Well," Gerry continued in a voice that can only be described as a cultured feminine snarl, "all right, I accept the challenge! And I can promise Kurtt and that sly simian, Von Zorn, a trouncing that they'll never forget!"

She strode to the visi-phone, snapped the lever. The eyes of the switchboard girl in the outer office stared frightenedly from the screen. Obviously she had been listening in through the inter-office communicator. Just as obviously, she held her employer in awe.

"Get me Barrows!" commanded Gerry peremptorily. "Get me Kränz. Rout

out that whole slovenly, craven crew of mine. Tell 'em we've got things to do and places to go, if they could possibly spare a little time from their carousing."

GERRY paused to smile a little. No one knew better than she that her crew was neither slovenly nor cowardly. They were picked men, culled from the thousands of hopeful adventurers from everywhere who constantly besieged her in their desire to join. They were intelligent, highly trained, vigorous, and incredibly loyal to their beloved leader. Several in the past had given their lives for her.

Though they sometimes played a game of grumbling about Gerry's iron-handed rule, they fiercely resented any outsider's intimation that her leadership was anything short of perfect. They lived dangerously, and severe discipline was the price of survival. They were envied by red-blooded men everywhere, and they were proud of it.

Gerry tossed her head confidently and smiled.

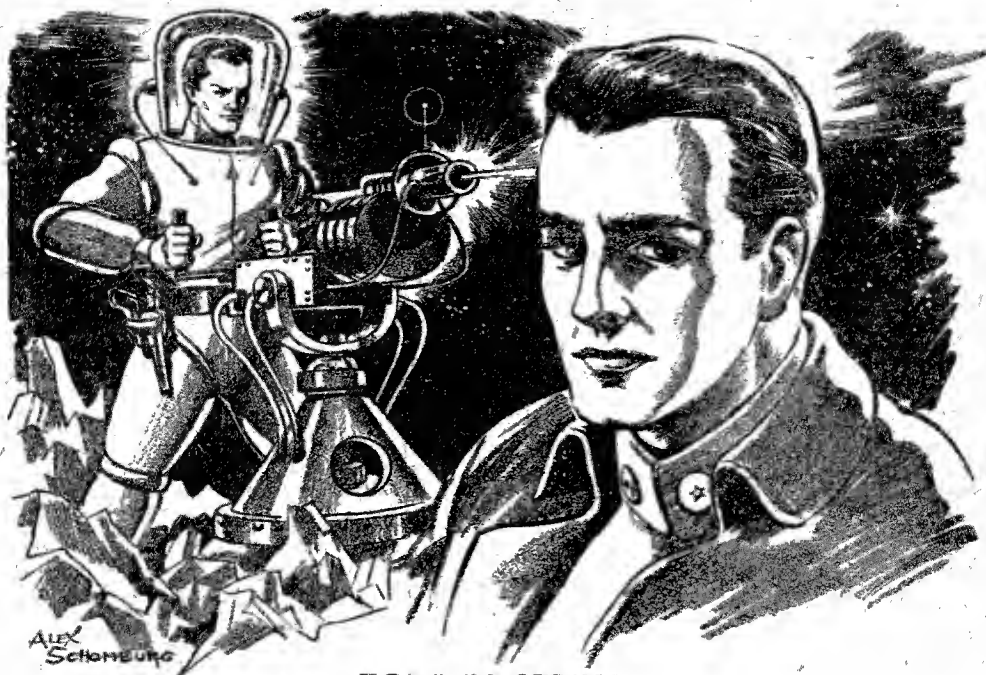
"I think Mister Kurtt won't find any such team as mine to go to bat for him. As for you, Claude"—she gazed at him as she might regard some remarkable but slightly distasteful swamp-thing from Venus—"you may run along now. Whip up your excitement and publicity fanfares. Make ready for the colossal ceremony, the great race.

"You've invigled me into this nonsense, and I'm agreeing only because it's a chance to hoist Von Zorn on his own petard. But it must be done on the grand scale, Claude. I want nothing petty."

Gerry walked to the passage that led to her private suite and exited with a faintly grandiose air. When angry, she had a tendency to dramatize her anger. Weatherby shut his gaping mouth. He seized his hat with the attitude of a man who has just been reprieved from the gas chamber.

"Y'know," he said bewilderedly to Strike, "she's quite a changeable woman. Sometimes I think she's a bit difficult to fathom."

Tommy smiled as he held the outer door for Weatherby. It was the understanding smile of one who has just lis-



TOMMY STRIKE

tened to a masterpiece of understatement.

"Quite," he agreed. "Rah-ther!"

CHAPTER II

Getaway Day

THE start of the Kurtt-Carlyle race was spectacular enough to satisfy the wildest dreams of any publicity man. Staged at the Long Island spaceport, it was carried out in the most hallowed traditions of such events.

The newscasters were there with their three-dimensional color cameras, picking up the ceremony for millions of listeners. Thousands of eager spectators thronged the many galleries of the port. To them, Gerry Carlyle was the epitome of all the heroines of history, adored for her beauty, her courage, her amazing exploits.

Weatherby, through the "papers," had given the affair a tremendous build-up. Notables, as advertised, spoke briefly. Among the foremost was Jan Hallek, the genial Dutch hunter whose fame was second only to Gerry's. He

expressed the attitude of all the recognized men of the craft. Ostentatiously he wished Gerry the best of luck and was politely distant toward Professor Kurtt.

The mayor of Greater New York, currently a presidential candidate, dwelt at length upon Gerry's courage and far-sightedness. Somehow he tied them up with the political party he represented.

The Governor of Idaho, the mayor's campaign manager, professed to see in Gerry's expeditionary force a perfect harmony between Capital and Labor. If his party was returned to power at the polls in November, he promised to bring about that ideal condition in the country.

Gerry and Tommy Strike viewed all this uproar somewhat cynically through the telecast set in the *Ark* itself. They were dog-tired. For one solid week, almost without rest, they had rushed through the tremendous task of outfitting the ship for an extended journey.

The mighty centrifuges were completely checked by expert mechanics, to be certain there would be no failure of motive power in mid-space. An end-

less stream of supplies—food, medicines, clothing, water, reading matter for the crew's off-duty hours—poured in through the open ports. Weapons of all kinds were stowed away in the arsenal. Space suits and all emergency equipment had to be examined. Scientific instruments were taken aboard.

A course was charted by Lewis, Chief Astronaut, double-checked by Gerry herself. She and Tommy had to call on their last dregs of energy to push through their program to completion in time.

Now Tommy was slumping exhaustedly in an easy chair and puffing the ancient pipe with which he had saved Gerry's life on Venus. That was the memorable occasion when she had determined to obtain the unobtainable murri. For sentimental reasons, he refused to throw it away. Like all organic matter when over-ripe, it smelled evilly.

"It seems to me," he grunted wearily, "that this fellow Kurtt is pretty thoroughly hated for a guy who isn't doing much harm. Why not give him the benefit of the doubt?"

Gerry sniffed in disdain.

"Come to the starboard port and look at his ship."

The Kurtt vessel lay in a starting cradle on the far side of the field, apart from the mob milling around the telecast ceremony. It was two-thirds the size of the *Ark*, plainly a refitted old-style rocket ship. One section, instead of being metal, was composed of glass to permit a spectator to see into the ship. The glass had a greenish tint, indicating a high iron content—the strongest type of glass to resist high pressures.

"SEE that?" Gerry demanded. "This Kurtt fake has made two or three short trips to the Moon, or maybe Mars. On the strength of that, he loads his ship with a conglomeration of sickly beasts from some broken-down zoo. Then he goes hedge-hopping about the country, making one-night stands, collecting nickels and dimes from the yokels. He's just like an old-time medicine showman. He tries to sell copies of his ungrammatical book, which is a dreary account of what he thinks were dramatic incidents in

his miserable existence."

Tommy grinned. "I still think it must be that feminine intuition of yours working overtime. I gather you just don't like the guy."

"He's an out-and-out fake. Are you defending him?"

Strike dodged the trap.

"Not me. If you and everybody think he's a phony, that's good enough for me. What worries me is that you're liable to underestimate him. After all, he has plenty of money behind him now. See those rocket tubes? They're lined with the latest super-resistant materials. Which means our friend must have completely new atomic engines, using Uranium Two-thirty-five. That costs. And besides, he's pretty confident, else he'd never have picked Saturn to race to."

"The best rocket ship in the system can't match the *Ark* for speed. I'll bet we could cut his flying time in half if we had to."

Gerry knew her ship and the almost unlimited power of centrifugal force it utilized. She had no fears for its superiority.

They were interrupted by a messenger who came running in excitedly. The climax of the grand shivaree outside had arrived. The presence of Gerry Carlyle was expected. She sighed, made swift magic with a lipstick, smoothed her shining hair, glanced with poorly concealed satisfaction in a mirror. Then, with a provocative wink at Strike, she hurried before him to the main port.

When Gerry Carlyle and Tommy Strike made their appearance, the cheering was tremendous and prolonged. Candid camera fiends clicked their shutters and fought for unusual angles. Autograph hunters battled one another grimly for "Catch-em-Alive" Carlyle's signature. The inevitable college youth tried to handcuff himself to Gerry's wrist in a futile effort to achieve fame. For Gerry Carlyle's name was synonymous with glamor—more than the most highly paid star who ever acted for Nine Planets Pictures.

In a swift blitzkrieg, the pair smilingly thrust their way through to the battery of microphones. And there,

for the first time, Strike met Professor Erasmus Kurtt. It was a shock.

Strike's innate sense of fair play had him prepared to lean over backward to do the fellow justice. He had already felt sorry for him in view of his universal unpopularity. But Kurtt was a creature not even a mother could love.

He was tall and rather lean, yet had a remarkably rounded little paunch. He looked as if he had just swallowed a whole melon. His hair was thinning on top, and his scalp was greasy from too much of some tonic. As he talked, his single gold tooth gleamed rhythmically in the Sun. He constantly hunched himself in an ingratiating gesture, while regaling bored reporters with his life story. Obviously he was excited with being in the spotlight. In short, he was the sort of character people always avoid for no particular reason, except complete disinterest.

"See what I mean?" whispered Gerry, as she advanced with a dazzling smile toward the mayor.

Strike nodded. He saw all right. Never in his life had he met anyone so thoroughly unlikable. Easy-going though he was, he felt he could really dislike Kurtt with no effort at all.

TOMMY managed to efface himself in the front line of the crowd. This was Gerry's show. He had no desire to intrude or make speeches or shake hands with anyone. He watched with impersonal detachment as the two contestants were introduced for the benefit of the color cameras and televisors.

Gerry, in the name of sportsmanship, had to shake Kurtt's clammy, fishlike paw. She listened patiently while Kurtt's oily, pompous platitudes rolled off his tongue. He called her "charming little lady" and "my dear" and made patronizing reference to her achievements "in spite of the handicap of her sex." Long after that, he concluded with the pious hope that the best man might win.

Strike watched uneasily as the unmistakable signs of rising temper made themselves manifest in Gerry's demeanor. He shrank instinctively before the expected storm. He did not shrink without cause. In the lull following perfunctory applause after

Kurtt's speech, Gerry's clear voice rang out.

"Where's Von Zorn?"

Kurtt smiled a pathetic imitation of a smile.

"Er—I beg your pardon?"

"Don't evade me, *Professor*." She turned directly to the microphones. "Ladies and gentlemen, you are doubtless wondering who is really responsible for this race. There is only one man I know in the entire Solar System who has the shockingly bad taste to try to take my job. Von Zorn, the motion picture person, is backing the professor, hoping to run me out of business. Von Zorn isn't here because he doesn't have that kind of nerve. Or perhaps he realizes that he has over-matched himself again. Or—"

The horrified announcer quickly pushed himself into the scene that was being telecast to millions of delighted listeners. Making smooth small talk, he deftly edged Gerry out of focus and sound before her tirade came to an end.

Strike shook his head. The combination of Gerry's long-standing feud with Von Zorn and Kurtt's unethical behavior had been too much. In spite of rigorous schooling, her famous temper still sometimes got out of hand. But now, of all times! Naturally everyone was rooting for her. Suppose though, after this scene which clearly indicated her contempt for her opponent, something should go wrong. What if Kurtt won? The humiliation, for a proud girl like Gerry, would be unbearable. Yes, the Carlyle neck was definitely stuck out this time.

Strike began to have a nagging little premonition. More closely than ever, he watched the ceremony. Gerry, as had been agreed upon beforehand, was to make public her selection of the monster whose capture was necessary for victory. She named the dermaphos of Saturn, so-called because, according to Murray—the great pioneer explorer whose books were standard texts in every college—the dermaphos' hide glowed with a faint phosphorescence.

Kurtt, much to Strike's increasing uneasiness, was not in least taken aback. Not much was known about the dermaphos, except from the writ-

ings of Murray and one or two other explorers. They described it as a relatively large creature and rather rare. Confident in the ability of her own crew to surmount any and all obstacles, Gerry had purposely chosen a beast that would be difficult to capture. But Kurtt was nodding and smiling, perfectly agreeable. It was a curious phenomenon, and it gave Strike considerable to think about.

At last the ceremony came to an end. Police firmly herded the crowd off the tarmac, leaving it clear for the two take-offs. Strike, awaiting his fiancée at the main port of the *Ark*, was too disturbed even to call her down for losing her temper at the microphone. Instead, he asked:

"Has it really occurred to you, kitten, just what's at stake in this silly race? You've deliberately selected a limb; sawed it half-through, and climbed out on it. If it breaks, after your interesting but impolite and boastful remarks, we're washed up. Completely. And Kurtt isn't acting like a man who's convinced he can't win."

Gerry smiled with complete aplomb.

"Masculine intuition, my love?" she taunted. "I know I acted like a cat just now, but I simply couldn't help it. Anyhow, I'll be a good girl and attend to business from now on. So you needn't worry about who's going to win this race. That, my brave warrior, is in the bag."

"I wonder," said Strike thoughtfully, as the rocket tubes of Kurtt's ship began to rumble mightily.

CHAPTER III

Hell Hole

THE Inferno, as described by Dante, is an unpleasant place. But for sheer ugliness, inhospitality and danger, it fails to approach the planet Saturn. Twenty-one days in that dreary hell convinced Tommy Strike of Saturn's absolute hideousness.

There was one favorable aspect. The surface gravity of Saturn was not much different from that of Earth. All other aspects concerning that malodorous

world afforded nothing but discomfort and peril to human beings. Of this Strike was positive as he gazed over the bleak landscape.

The surface of Saturn was rugged. Tremendous mountain ranges reared massively into the murky atmosphere, colossal on a scale that would dwarf anything known on Earth. Most of their surfaces were frozen solid. That was not so much because of temperature—for internal heat made Saturn sufficiently warm to support life—but because of the great pressures created by Saturn's thousands of miles of atmosphere. This was proved by the occasional outcroppings of blue-gray "rock," which were solidified ammonia.

Clumping steps along the corridor of the *Ark* drew Strike's attention. It was Gerry, dressed in the special suit designed for use under such abnormal pressures. As an extra precaution, helium was used instead of nitrogen to prevent any possibility of the "bends."

"More observations?" inquired Tommy despairingly.

She smiled with gentle understanding.

"Yes, a few more. But our three weeks' work is showing splendid results. It won't be long now. I know it's boring, but you realize as well as I that we're up against a completely and unclassified unknown form of life. Most people, of course, think our job's done when we bag a specimen and get him into the ship. As a matter of fact, the hard part is yet to come. Catching 'em alive is much easier than *keeping* 'em alive and well."

"I know, I know." Strike knew the entire lecture by heart. "We must exactly duplicate in the hold of the *Ark* every feature of the animal's environment. As far as possible, we must learn of what he's composed, his habits, what he eats and drinks and breathes, and how much. Transporting a creature through millions of miles of free space into an alien environment is not a job for an amateur."

Gerry applauded clumsily with her bulky gauntlets.

"Bravo! Sometimes I really think you're learning something about this business. Coming along, my hero?"

Strike made a wry face, but obedient-

ly turned to the empty suit standing within the air-lock. A moment later, properly dressed, he stepped with Gerry to the hard-packed soil of Saturn's lowlands. The hour was mid-day, though full daylight was only a weak solution of night.

Gerry squinted a weather-eye at the heavens, observed the turgidly boiling fragments of cloud masses whipping past. The daily windstorm, which came regularly enough to set a clock by, was about over. Now its tag ends were confined to the upper reaches. Common to all the larger planets, Saturn suffered tremendous gales of ammonia and methane that raged above the main body of hydrogen-helium atmosphere.

THE Ark was resting in the bottom of a moderate-sized valley. This landing place had been chosen partly because it afforded shelter against the elements, but mostly because of a remarkable feature of Saturn's atmosphere.

There were still traces of oxygen on the planet. Being heavier than the other gases on the planet, the oxygen had gathered in "pools" in the low spots. Since animal life was dependent upon oxygen even on that miserable planet, the result was that small "islands" of life were distributed over Saturn existing only where sufficient oxygen remained. Naturally that helped Gerry's search considerably. The Ark simply hopped from valley to valley till they found a spot with one or more specimens of the dermaphos they were seeking.

After finding a colony, all their efforts had been devoted to the most thorough analysis of the animal's environment, to reproduce it perfectly within the space ship.

As Gerry and Strike walked ponderously along a familiar path, they encountered other members of the crew already at work. One party was busily engaged in digging vast amounts of Saturnian vegetation for transplanting inside the ship. This was to feed the dermaphos.

The plants were invariably low-growing vegetables, clinging close to the ground to prevent being uprooted by the terrible winds. The leaves were

thick, spatulate, like some of Earth's ornamental cacti, and dark in color. Others were shaped like tightly bunched artichokes, some like large, flat mushrooms. One type, the favorite of the dermaphos, looked like a beligerent cabbage.

As the two walked along, occasional gusts of wind rattled a miniature hail of armored insect life against their metallic suits. Once a blundering birdlike thing flapped heavily, shrieking mournfully, "Meeee! Meeee!" It was the Screaming Meemie.

Farther on, Gerry paused before a small, dense bush somewhat resembling the carnauba palm tree, from which Brazilian natives get coffee from the seeds, and cream from the sap.

The Saturnian plant went the carnauba one better, however. Its leaves made a tasty salad when mixed with its fruit, and a delicious drink could be distilled from its sap. To top it off, a fragrant spice could be shaken from its pinkish blossoms. Hence its name—the Blue Plate Special plant. Gerry stripped the bush eagerly, dropping her prizes into a specimen bag.

Once Strike pointed out a splatter of sticky stuff clinging to a stone. Rising from this, clear out of sight into the low-flying scud, rose a thin, silvery strand.

"Kite," remarked Strike over the tiny portable two-way radio in his space suit.

Gerry nodded. The Saturnian kite was an eight-legged creature with folds of membrane between its limbs, much in the fashion of the Terrestrial flying squirrel. It also spun a filament like a spider's web, though its thread was infinitely more powerful. The kite's web was actually thinner than piano wire, yet its tensile strength was almost twice the wire's.

The kite was insectivorous. During each of the periodical winds, it allowed itself to be swooped into the air, maintaining contact with the ground by spinning its lengthy filament. One end of the thread was firmly attached to a rock by some organic adhesive manufactured within its glands. In the teeth of a gale, it spread itself wide imitating a parachute net, to trap the millions of insects being dashed about by the wind.

At any time, the kite could descend by "reeling in" on the practically indestructible strand.

"I'M glad we managed to catch a couple of those things," Gerry remarked. "I have an idea we might make a fortune from them."

"No kidding! How? Sell 'em to little boys every March, instead of using paper and string for their kites?"

"No, silly. Get a couple of those creatures to spin a few miles of that amazing filament, and you could weave a coat or any other garment that would never wear out. Just think what the cotton and wool and silk tycoons would pay us to keep that off the market!"

Strike disdained to reply. In a few moments, they entered the area where they had located their dermaphos. The animal was apparently a rather rare specimen, yet once it had been located, it remained pretty well staked out. That was because it was an extremely sluggish creature, moving only short distances at any time.

Without much searching, the two hunters relocated their monster. Strike stood staring at it wryly.

"Not much of a beastie, is he?"

The dermaphos certainly was somewhat of a disappointment, being absolutely unmelodramatic in appearance. There was nothing exciting about it, like the Venusian whip, or the cactus of Satellite Five of Jupiter. Nor was there anything attractive about it, like the famous energy eaters of Mercury.

It appeared to be merely a ten-foot, crested lizard with a thick, warty hide. There were peculiarities, of course. Its six feet had only two toes apiece, indicating that evolution on Saturn had taken cognizance of the futility of scratching at that dense, rocky soil. More strangely, despite the pictures in Murray's tests which showed rows of phosphorescent lights like those that decorate deep-sea fishes, this dermaphos did not glow. For the most part, though, it was an ordinary creature, considering what important matters hinged upon its capture.

"Well, what's on the program today, kitten?" Strike wanted to know.

"A pound of flesh. Dr. Kelly is playing the role of Shylock, and would like

a sample of our friend here for analysis. He's been working on the puzzle of why the dermaphos doesn't phos. So he's been taking pictures and all sorts of tests."

Strike considered. The dermaphos' hide was much too thick for any sort of injection of local anesthetics, though it could be gassed into temporary unconsciousness. But that would be the means to be used for the actual capture, and Gerry disliked to give her prospective victims any advance hint of what was in store for them. Some of the planetary life-forms were amazingly adaptable. After one shot of anesthetic, they could develop immunity to it.

"Big reptiles are always sluggish," said Tommy jauntily. "I'll bet I can whack off a piece before he even realizes what's happened."

He selected a hand-ax from the row of hooks round the outside of his suit, which had more equipment than a Boy Scout kit. Confidently he stepped around behind the dermaphos as it browsed sleepily on the leathery foliage. Seizing the tip of the monster's tail, he smashed the ax down. Instantly he was flung off-balance by a ton of enraged flesh. He fell heavily, and the world spun with incredible speed.

WHEN his eyes focused properly again, Strike found himself staring into the gaping jaws of the dermaphos. In his ears, the angry and frightened scream of his fiancée was ringing.

"Tommy! Tommy! Are you hurt? Don't move. I'm coming!"

Strike grinned shakily.

"Relax. Everything's under control, I think. He can't hurt me in this suit. Just get around behind him and warm his stern with a heat beam. And listen, Gerry, remember your credo—no unnecessary heroics. Stay well out of danger."

A faint sobbing breath in Strike's ear-phones was the only audible indication that the girl was anything but under iron-nerved control. For a minute there was an armed truce, while the dermaphos tried to make a decision. Strike remained motionless. Ax in one hand and tail fragment in the other, he stared

unblinkingly into the unquestionably lethal mouth of the ugly Saturnian monster.

Since he was involuntarily in a position to do so, he made observations. The beast had sharp teeth in front as well as grinders in the rear. That showed that he was probably omnivorous, though none of the hunting party had seen him eat anything but vegetation. Besides, at least four of the fangs appeared to be backed by glands of some sort. The acid secretion drolled slowly onto the breast of Strike's pressure suit, and it was so powerful that the metal became pitted.

Beyond the range of Strike's vision, Gerry went into action. The dermaphos squealed suddenly with rage and flipped its mighty bulk around to face a new tormentor.

Strike rolled wildly aside to avoid the thrashing monster. Even in that confused instant of activity, he got a glimpse of the raw spot on the dermaphos' tail where he had hacked off the living flesh. It was still smoking from Gerry's well aimed heat ray blast, and Strike found time for swift sympathy. That must have stung the unhappy creature badly.

Then the brief drama was finished. Strike clambered to his feet and moved to safety on the far side of the clearing, while Gerry calmly lured away the slow-moving dermaphos.

Presently the two hunters joined

forces again. Strike bowed clumsily and offered the bit of flesh from the animal.

"Compliments of the management," he said with an affected accent, "for mademoiselle."

The two looked deeply into each other's eyes, and unspoken volumes passed between them. They were a modern couple, those two, wont to spend more time kidding and roughhousing than in tender words. But they were also in love. Physical danger to either, though pretty much to be expected in their profession, was always harrowing to the other.

"It's times like these," Gerry said slowly, "when I think of chucking the whole thing."

"And settle down in a little gray penthouse in the west?"

They grinned at each other. Gerry could never of her own volition quit the rigorous, exciting game in which she was an acknowledged leader. It was in her blood like an incurable disease. She was the kind to die with her boots on, probably on some distant world where human feet had never trod before. Life, for her, consisted of boldly tackling murderous life-forms for the benefit of the millions of spectators who yearly thronged the London Interplanetary Zoo.

There was no other, and they both knew it.

[Turn page]

From the Confidential Notebook of Mr. F---



3 Felt like a million when I got up this morning. Ex-Lax worked fine. Just watch me go after those birds today!



1 Muffed two important sales today. Had no pep—just couldn't get going! Wonder if I hadn't better take a laxative—been putting it off too long.



2 Harry said I ought to try Ex-Lax. Took some before I turned in for the night. Say, this Ex-Lax taste is a new one on me—just like chocolate!

The action of Ex-Lax is thorough, yet gentle! No shock. No strain. No weakening after-effects. Just an easy, comfortable bowel movement that brings blessed relief. Try Ex-Lax next time you need a laxative. It's good for every member of the family.

10¢ and 25¢



CHAPTER IV

Disaster!

SHRUGGING off the momentary reaction, Strike and Gerry made their way slowly back to the *Ark*. Dr. Kelly, a red-headed Irish biologist with a Harvard accent, met them as they stepped inside the air-lock. Excited, he seized the piece of the dermaphos. With a brief apology, he rushed off to his little laboratory, trailing a mutter of inaudible comments. Gerry looked after the scientist in wonder.

"Seems to be in a terrible rush," she observed.

She learned the reason shortly. Turning toward the control room, she and Strike came across Lieutenant Barrows, whose young face was frowning in pure, concentrated worry. He gasped with relief when his superiors arrived.

"Oh, Miss Carlyle!" he blurted. "Something unexpected has turned up. Professor Kurtt visited us today!"

"Kurtt, here? That's impossible! Saturn's thirty-two thousand miles in diameter. He couldn't just drop in on us like a bill collector!"

Once again Strike felt that familiar prickle of apprehension whenever he thought or heard of Kurtt. The fake professor looked like a harmless bore to the naked eye, but close inspection revealed his deadly qualities. Tommy had learned never to underestimate an opponent, and he recognized the man's cool, quiet shrewdness. And this latest move made him feel more uneasy than ever.

"I dare say," he pointed out, "that it was no great trick to find us. Saturn seems to be poor in any sizable metallic deposits, so a good detector would record the presence of the *Ark* promptly. No, that isn't what worries me. It's why he came."

Barrows said that practically half the crew were away from the ship, doing scheduled tasks. The remainder, the scientists, were in their labs.

"When I stepped out of the control room," he continued, "I found Kurtt and four of his crew strolling along the main corridor as if they owned the

place. He apologized for walking in, but said no one answered his hails. He tried to pump me about our progress, but he got mighty little out of me." Barrows looked faintly complacent.

"Is he gone now?" Gerry snapped.

"Oh, yes, Miss—"

"Crew know about Kurtt coming here?"

"Those in the ship heard him talking with me as I tried to maneuver him outside without a fuss. Dr. Kelly knows, and Dr.—"

"Did Kurtt let anything slip about what he's been doing since arriving on Saturn?"

"Well, I thought he seemed a little worried. I don't really believe he's located a dermaphos yet, Miss Car—"

"Okay. We pulled a boner by not setting a guard. But it's obvious that Kurtt came nosing around to see if we'd found a dermaphos yet, and, if so, to try stealing it off right from under our noses."

She took a deep breath and began to give her orders to the now thoroughly alarmed Barrows.

"Call in all the crew. Everyone. As soon as they get here, tell Kranz to take five men with him, and a full complement of weapons and gravity plates. Have Kranz stake himself out by our dermaphos, but make no move till I contact him by radio. Just watch, and protect our property in case Kurtt should try to hijack it. On your toes, now. Snap to it!"

HARDLY missing a beat in her machine-gun firing of orders, Gerry whisked into the control room and switched on the inter-ship communicator.

"You researchers, attention! Bring your reports to the control room at once. We're leaving shortly, if it's at all possible."

Before actually catching any alien monster, Gerry always had her scientific staff learn every possible item concerning the beast. Then the data was thoroughly gone over in a general meeting. If they agreed that enough was known to insure safe transport of their prize, the expedition was then brought to a swift close.

The present conclave quickly came together in Gerry's presence. Analyses of vegetation and general environment and other data were quickly given. A few unexpected items were brought out. The first concerned the planet itself. Apparently Saturn, locally at least, was quite rich in uranium. That fact would have been worth a fortune a few years ago. Since the discovery of vast uranium deposits on the Moon, however, uranium on as distant a planet as Saturn was interesting, but of no particular value.

More to the point was the fact that some of the plant life, particularly the cabbagelike favorite of the dermaphos, seemed to utilize uranium as Earthly plants utilize sulphur and other minerals. Deposits of uranium salts had been found in the foliage.

Most interesting of all was Dr. Kelly's report, based on a quick check of the sample of dermaphos flesh which Strike had brought in.

"The fact that the beast didn't phosphoresce had been worrying me," he explained. "It occurred to me that perhaps it was a fluorescence that showed up in Murray's pictures. Of course, the dermaphos doesn't noticeably fluoresce to the naked eye, either. But there are quite a few mineral salts which fluoresce under the impact of ultra-violet. I remembered that the electroscopes showed the presence of uranium, which reacts under ultra-violet rays.

"Then I thought it was entirely possible that Murray's photos were taken with UV flash bulbs or photo-floods. So I experimented with my own camera, and some UV lights. Sure enough, it's the uranium in the dermaphos itself that causes it to glow under ultra-violet! It eats uranium. Just why, no one could say without prolonged study of the animal, both alive and dissected.

"Our bodies use many minerals, of course. My guess would be that uranium salts act as a catalytic agent in the processes of metabolism and digestion, somewhat as some of our own ductless gland secretions. Then, after their work is done, they are eliminated unchanged through the skin. That's only a guess, of course—"

"Good work, men," Gerry cut in. "It tells me what I want to know. We can make our capture immediately. I want to pull out of here at once, because our rival has been prowling around and might think it cute to hijack our dermaphos. Barrows."

"Yes, Miss Carlyle?"

"The hold is fully prepared?"

"Two of them are replicas of Saturn to the last detail. I have put all the incidental specimens like the kites and the Screaming Meemies in one hold, according to your orders. The second hold is reserved for the dermaphos. He rides alone, so there will no chance of a free-for-all fight ruining our prize."

"Spare us the lecture, Mister Barrows." Gerry was acid, impatient. "Radio Kranz. Tell him to make the capture. It should be quite simple. Use anesthetic gas bombs, of course. The rest of you prepare to take off."

Quickly the control room emptied, leaving only Gerry and Strike. For perhaps fifteen minutes they worked silently, making ready for the departure. Then Strike, glancing out the forward port, spied Kranz returning on the double-quick with his squad. Behind them, suspended by gravity bands adjusted to neutralize exactly the force of gravity, the sleeping dermaphos was hauled along.

"Kranz is back," said Strike. "He has the prize."

Gerry jumped, her nerves on edge.

"Good." She sighed with relief. "That finishes us up here. A good job well done, and will I be glad to leave this place! Nothing left now but a few comfortable weeks in space, then the victory celebration. Professor Kurtt, I'm happy to say, is stymied."

Strike said nothing. He had a nagging sense of having overlooked something, a feeling almost of foreboding. It had all been too easy so far. Was it just a sort of calm before the fury?

It was. When they were only a short distance from Saturn disaster struck.

"ABANDON ship!"

The call rang through loud-speakers in every corner of the mighty rocket craft.

"Abandon ship. Prepare to abandon ship."

That cry had resounded throughout the *Ark* many times before, but only in periodical life-boat drills, practise for an emergency that no one dreamed would ever really arise. The *Ark*, one of the greatest of space ships, had been built with every resource of modern science to make it impregnable against the assaults of space or unpredictable conditions on alien worlds. Could such a ship ever be destroyed? It seemed impossible.

The quiet, icy voice of Gerry Carlyle, as calm as if she were ordering dinner, came through the speakers in every compartment.

"Abandon ship. Prepare to abandon ship."

Throughout the length and breadth of the *Ark* there was orderly confusion. The mighty hull shivered suddenly, racked by some terrible internal disturbance. It was the fifth explosion of rapidly increasing severity that had shaken her from stem to stern.

The report from the engine room was incoherent. The huge centrifuges seemed to be crumbling, flying apart inexplicably. As each cluster of rotors broke away, it hurtled with frightful speed clean through the double walls of the ship. The control panel was a jumble of wreckage, as if smashed by the blast of some cosmic shotgun. It was only a miracle that there were no casualties yet.

As oxygen rushed out into the vacuum of space, automatic bulkheads began to rumble shut. Tortured metal screamed somewhere deep in the ship. Presently the acrid stench of ammonia filtered through the corridors. At least one of the animal holds with internal pressure equal to that of Saturn's atmosphere, had blown outward, perhaps weakened by the rupturing of the adjacent engine room walls.

There was no panic. Speedily the members of the crew gathered up those items of equipment that were designated as "vital" in case of such emergency. Then, three to a car, they entered the miniature rocket ships within special locks in the sides of the *Ark*. A signal flashed on each control board. The pilots flashed back their readiness for the take-off.

Abruptly the ship spouted monsters

and rockets like a surrealist Roman candle.

IN the glassite bow of the *Ark*, Gerry Carlyle and Tommy Strike, true to ancient traditions, waited for their crew to get clear before they abandoned their ship. As each life-boat shot away, another light gleamed on a panel in the pilot room.

Finally there were seven lights showing. All the life-boats but one were clear. Hovering at a safe distance from the *Ark*, they waited for further orders. Gerry took one final look about the room. It had been more of a home to her than any other place. Then Strike and Chief Astronaut Lewis hurried in. They had stowed away the charts and instruments.

"All set, gentlemen?" Gerry asked coolly.

"All set."

Both men carefully avoided any sentimentality. They knew Gerry was as bitterly heart-broken as they were, and knew also that she would fiercely resent any suggestion of feminine weakness. It was one of the traits for which they admired her.

The three of them stepped into the last life-boat.

Strike sent the little rocket streaking away out of immediate danger. They took a backward glance, after they had withdrawn about a half-mile. The stricken *Ark* was drifting helplessly.

Slowly revolving, she revealed a gaping hole in her stern. The tangled ruins of one of her centrifuges dangled from the gash like exposed intestines. Outlined against the bright hull was one of the Saturnian kites. It had been cast forth when one of the holds near the engine room had given way. Accustomed to withstand Saturn's pressures, the kite had literally exploded into tatters. That was what would happen when all the specimens were exposed to empty space.

Gerry shuddered. Quickly, though, she established short-wave communication with the castaways and rallied them around like a cluster of silvery, flame-spurting metal fish. The first thing was to take stock of their situation.

On the credit side was the fact that

they had been less than twenty-four hours away from Saturn, and still accelerating, when the accident struck them down. Saturn loomed gigantic in the sky. Its eternal rainbow rings looked so near, it seemed almost as if one could reach out and break off a piece.

Before Gerry could issue an order, an excited voice hammered through her loudspeaker.

"Miss Carlyle! Captain Strike! A space ship is coming up under the stern of the *Ark*!"

CHAPTER V

The Etiquette of Murder

GERRY and Strike stared at each other in electric tension. Another ship? Rescue?

"This is incredible," said Gerry in an awed tone. "Why, the odds against another ship being in this part of the Solar System at this particular moment must be billions to one." Sudden misgivings troubled her. "You don't suppose—"

They ran into each other, striving to see out of the forward port. Gerry groaned.

"It's that Kurtt! He would show up at a time like this. I'd almost rather not be rescued than to have—"

"This wouldn't be more than mere coincidence, would it?" Strike asked, his voice low and tense.

The radiophone signal buzzed. Gerry reluctantly snapped the switch. Coming through the televisior, Kurtt's buttery voice fairly dripped sympathy.

"Are you there, Miss Carlyle? Dear, dear, what a shocking disaster! I sincerely trust that no one has been injured. What could possibly have been the matter? Some structural weakness, no doubt."

Strike saw Gerry beginning to seethe.

"This is a time for diplomacy, kitten," he whispered. Facing the transmitter, he said: "Look, Kurtt. We've cracked up. Under these circumstances, of course, our little contest must be put aside. If you'd be so good

Strike sent blast after blast at the charging Gora



as to ease over this way and take us aboard—"

"All in good time, Mr. Strike," Kurtt replied soothingly. "All in good time."

But his ship, instead of rescuing the castaways, moved alongside the *Ark*. It fastened itself to the riven hull like a leech. With a strangled exclamation, Gerry seized a pair of binoculars. She could see right through the glassed-in portion of Kurtt's ship. That part of the hold was partially filled with Saturnian vegetation, mostly the artichoke type and Blue Plate Special plants, doubtless intended to feed captured specimens. There were a few of these visible, but no dermaphos.

But the presence of the dermaphos was not long in coming. Mistily, through the green glass, Gerry could see figures moving, a port sliding open. Choking with rage, she cried out:

"The thief is helping himself to our dermaphos! We spent weeks preparing to make our capture, before finding one of the things. And now he helps himself, just like that. How does he get that way?"

As if in answer to her anguished exclamation, Kurtt's unctuous voice became audible again.

"Laws of salvage, Miss Carlyle, as you know. I hate to take advantage of your misfortune. Still, all's fair in love and war. Rather lucky for me that I happened along. I hadn't had time to locate a dermaphos before you were all ready to leave. That's the penalty of traveling in a slower ship. How fortunate that your specimen was still secure in its compartment. Might have been thrown free and ruined."

"Okay!" snapped Strike. "You've got the dermaphos. Now give us a hand here, will you?"

"Ah, I was coming to that. As a matter of fact, my poor ship is so small. That's the penalty of not being wealthy and glamorous. You see, there is hardly room for any more passengers. Insufficient food and oxygen, you understand. I might take two or three aboard, but how can I choose whom to take and whom to leave behind? Am I God, thus to deny succor to my fellow-men?" He registered pious shock. "Oh, my, no!"

Then he continued.

"I'm so sorry, but it is beyond my poor capabilities to aid you. However, be assured that I shall send out rescue parties just as soon as I get within radio range of Earth."

Thunderstruck, Strike stared at the microphone as if it had turned into a snake.

"Kurtt!" he bellowed. "You can't do this. It's murder! You wouldn't go off and leave us stranded in mid-space. Kurtt, are you listening?"

BUT Kurtt's rocket ship was already gathering momentum. It spewed flame in a great red blossom, kicking sharply away from the side of the *Ark*. For a supposedly slow ship, it gathered speed surprisingly as the pilot recklessly poured in the fuel. Within a minute's time it dwindled. Then its dark shape was abruptly lost in the blackness of interstellar space.

Strike turned to his fiancée.

"I had a hunch we were underestimating that bird. He's as cold-blooded a killer as the most vicious specimen we ever caught. Well, there goes everything. Von Zorn has backed a winner at last. The Zoo contract, the *Ark*, and us—wiped out."

Gerry's shoulders twitched. Strange, burbling sounds came from her throat. Suddenly she threw back her head and burst into hearty laughter.

"Oh, I just thought of something. What a joke on poor Kurtt! Only he doesn't know it yet."

Strike and Lewis stared at one another in horrified astonishment. Was Gerry Carlyle of the iron nerves and the stout heart giving way to hysteria? The mere idea was a grim reminder that they were in a predicament from which there was little hope of escape. The two men quickly looked away, ostentatiously pretending to busy themselves with nothing in particular. The girl's hearty laughter abruptly ceased.

"Stop acting like silly boys who were caught stealing the jam! I'm not hysterical. It is a joke, a colossal one. But I'm determined to be there when Kurtt finds out about it. It's too good to miss. So let's get busy and find a way out of this mess."

Quickly Gerry opened a small locker,

took out the Emergency Chart every astronaut must have before being allowed to leave Earth. A map of the Solar System, it was marked to indicate the nearest source of aid in case of breakdown, illness or any other disaster at any particular point in space.

Gerry's finger quickly traced out the Saturnian system. The four inner satellites were colored black, signifying that they were airless chunks of rock, utterly useless for any purpose.

Rhea was marked with a red cross to indicate mineral wealth. Both the outer satellites, Iapetus and Phoebe, had arrows to show rocket fuel and food caches for stranded space wanderers. Hyperion was too small to be considered. But Titan, largest of all, had both blue and red crosses, indicating habitability plus mineral wealth.

Gerry was faced with the need of making a vital decision. Moreover, there would be no changing that decision once it was made. Of that handful of satellites, they could manage a lucky landing on only one. After they made their choice, there would be no getting away again unless and until the *Ark* was repaired. The tiny, short-range life-boats would be useless for cosmic distances.

Coolly Gerry stowed the Emergency Chart away and turned to the row of slim reference books that lined the bottom shelf. This little library was her pride. The most complete of its kind in the System, it had been compiled by Gerry herself.

It was a digest of every known fact concerning the planets, their satellites, and the asteroids. In it were represented every space explorer from Murray to the present, and the gleanings of knowledge by interplanetary hunters like Hallek and Gerry Carlyle. There was also a lengthy contribution—Gerry made a wry face—by Anthony Quade, Society of Spatial Cameramen, and the data he had collected while roaming the void for movie locations.

SHE opened up the volume on Saturn and its satellites, turned to Titan and quickly flipped the pages. Titan was extraordinarily rich in minerals of almost every conceivable type. Only transportation costs prevented

mining there. Also, its atmosphere was breathable, its temperatures apparently not lethally extreme.

More remarkable, according to Murray's writings, there was civilized life on Titan. The cities there had been built with an amazing genius for metal-working. But Murray's notes were sketchy on the subject. It seemed that the inhabitants of Titan were few in number and difficult to communicate with, though quite friendly.

The fact that highly evolved life existed on the satellite was not startling. Advanced civilizations had been discovered in at least three other places in the System. If any nomadic tribe, gifted with the ability to work in metals, had wandered in from outer space and decided to locate in the Solar System, it was only natural for them to select Titan and its wealth of ores.

Gerry was not interested in making any social contacts at the moment. But it was the fact of life on Titan that motivated her final decision. The *Ark* needed metals for repair, and they were to be had on Titan. As a last resort, the inhabitants might conceivably be able to help. The girl weighed this possibility carefully against the undeniable fact that if any other rocket ships were to enter the Saturnian system, they would land only on the two outer satellites, never on Titan. Confident in her own self-reliance and the ability of her crew, though, Gerry made her choice.

Incisively she gave her orders. The eight little life-boats moved purposefully toward the *Ark*. Jockeying skillfully into place like tugs about an ocean liner, they began to haul the mighty space ship toward its rendezvous. Saturn's largest satellite was rapidly hurtling closer to the site of the disaster.

At first there was little appreciable progress. Then gradually momentum was gathered, aided by the growing effect of the satellite's gravity. More swiftly moved the *Ark*, till the life-boats were forced to reverse their positions and act as brakes. The surface of Titan expanded with a terrifying rush. Desperately the miniature rocket ships strove to check the dangerous descent, blasting furiously with every available ounce of their limited

fuel supply. In the final moments before the crash, the entire underside of the *Ark* was obscured by the savage blaze of the little rocket tubes.

Timing it perfectly, Gerry gave the order to dart away from underneath the falling juggernaut. With an awful concussion, the *Ark's* stern plowed deep into the soil of Titan, throwing a huge powdery wave into the air. Then, almost in slow motion, the rest of the tremendous metal giant toppled downward. Rocks and dust sprayed out on either side. The *Ark* lurched once like a dying monster, and gently rolled over on one side.

Gerry smiled, pleased with her expertness. She had brought the ship down so its torn hull would be easy to reach.

Gently, like a flock of curious birds, the life-boats fluttered to rest in a ragged circle. Gerry dabbed at her forehead with a wisp of handkerchief, then smiled hardily at the two men.

"Well, here we are on Titan, without benefit of brass bands." She paused, before continuing in a casual voice. "You know, I wonder if the place is destined to be our tomb."

CHAPTER VI

Sabotage

THE eyes of every occupant in the eight life-boats gazed questioningly at the surface of the strange little world. Had Gerry Carlyle's fanatical attention to detail paid dividends again, enabling her to select the one right place for them to land? Or had the sketchy information in her library betrayed them into descending into a hostile environment? Perhaps it would be so freezingly cold that repairs to the *Ark* would be impossible. In that case, they were doomed to a lingering death.

In the main boat, Gerry and Strike were relieving the tension of doubt by swift routine, refusing to take anything for granted. Thermometers, atmospheric drift gauges, barometers, and bolometers were projected through vacuum suction tubes. Air samples were drawn in through the Bradbury

valves and automatically analyzed. Visual observations were made through the glassite ports, for Titan was rather well lighted by the reflected glow of Saturn.

The surface of the satellite was irregular, hilly. Jagged cones of possible volcanic origin formed a low range of foothills, with a pass leading to the region beyond. Dunes of fluffy material like volcanic tuff dotted the near landscape.

This and other reports were exchanged between the life-boats. Presently a complete picture began to appear. It was even more favorable than suggested by Murray's notes. The thin atmosphere was largely nitrogen, helium and oxygen, with indications of negligible amounts of other gases in unstable equilibrium. Methane was present in small amounts. This, being the product of organic decomposition, indicated vegetable life.

The temperature was only slightly below freezing. Doubtless Titan received heat from Saturn and the Sun, almost undiminished by any absorbent atmospheric layers. Gravity on a body only a few thousand miles in diameter would be relatively weak, less than half normal Earth gravity.

With understandable pride, for the value of her incredible thoroughness had proved itself again, Gerry finally contacted all the life-boats.

"We're perfectly safe, men. Dress warmly. Carry a bottle of oxygen with a tube, and take a breath of it every minute or so in order to prevent blood bubbles from forming. Hand weapons, of course, just in case. So, everybody out!"

A faint cheer returned to her through the communicator. The life-boats disgorged their human cargo as if eight weird eggs were hatching out. After a brief period of leg-stretching and adjusting to temperature and adjustment to temperature and weak gravity, Gerry immediately organized her forces to cope with their grave predicament.

The extent of damage had to be surveyed by the engineers and workmen. Then a party under Strike's leadership prepared to reconnoiter the immediate vicinity to make sure they were in no danger from hostile life-forms. They

used one of the life-boats, powered with the little fuel remaining in the tanks of the other seven. Finally Gerry herself led a small expedition to examine thoroughly the other parts of the *Ark*.

Strike reported all clear. The only thing of interest was one of the cities Murray described. It was just a few miles away, but apparently long deserted. Gerry reported that the damage to the ship was surprisingly small. The crash upon Titan had been eased expertly. A few dents in the hull and a number of fixtures torn loose inside were the only internal casualties. Two compartments had been torn open to outer space—the engine room and the first Saturnian hold next to it.

Both groups gathered around outside the tangle that once was the engine room, watching the workmen clear the debris away. With oxygen bottles in one hand and tubes leading to their mouths, they looked like a group of solemn Turks puffing on their hookahs.

INSIDE, where the engineers crawled about with portable X-ray equipment, were twin centrifuges. Running in opposite directions to obviate torque, they were composed of thousands of tiny rotors spinning at a rate of nearly fifty thousand revolutions per second.

The principle had been worked out three-quarters of a century before by Professor Rouss, of the University of Virginia. Rouss ran rotors eight thousand revolutions a second in blasts of compressed air, achieving centrifugal force a million times as strong as gravity. The *Ark*, a mighty centrifugal flier, was the ultimate development of that early experiment. The double centrifuge in her stern was powerful enough to move a great mountain.

After an hour's steady labor, the Chief Engineer reported to Gerry. There was an odd look on his face.

"Well, Baumstark," she urged impatiently. "What's the score?"

Speaking in clipped phrases, Baumstark replied.

"Seem to have two outs on us, Miss Carlyle. We've pretty thoroughly X-rayed the mess. The starboard centrifuge is undamaged, but the others is in a bad way." He held up several strips

of film. "You can see what the Laue patterns show—advanced crystallization. Big sections of the rotors collapsed from metal fatigue at the same time, and flew apart."

"Do you have any idea what caused it?" she asked tersely.

Baumstark took a battered ruin of tubes and coils from one of the workmen. He offered this as evidence.

"This probably was a vibration pack. We found it crushed in among a cluster of shattered rotors. Someone deliberately introduced it into the centrifuges, and it created rhythms that induced metal fatigue. We've been sabotaged, Miss Carlyle."

Gerry and Strike exchanged a long look of slowly dawning comprehension.

"So," murmured Strike. "My hunch was right. Friend Kurtt evidently found time to do the job right before Barrows found him wandering around inside the *Ark*. Clever, in a way, much better than a bomb. It became effective only when we started the centrifuges for our take-off. Kurtt wanted to be sure he wouldn't wreck things till we were well out in space. With luck, the vibrator would have been hurled out through the hole in the hull, and we would never have known the cause of the trouble.

"Kurtt, of course, simply had to hang around near Saturn, wait till we showed up, and then tag along at a safe distance. Sooner or later, he knew he could grab our dermaphos without an argument. No wonder he was so agreeable when the dermaphos was chosen, and no wonder he picked Saturn. It's far enough out of the way so it would be unlikely that anyone would be around to interfere or rescue us."

Gerry, whose intuitive hate and distrust had been proved so well founded, took this evidence of utterly cold-blooded treachery with surprising calm. She smiled with grim promise.

"I rather pity poor Von Zorn when we get back."

Strike looked troubled.

"You don't think Von Zorn actually ordered Kurtt to do anything like this do you?"

"Oh, no. He doesn't like me, because I know him for the faker he is. But he fights fair. That much I grant. No.

Von Zorn will be appalled when he learns what his hireling has been up to. But the fact remains that Kurtt is Von Zorn's man. And I think I can do business with that fact when we return."

"If we return, you mean. Kurtt never meant to let us survive, and he's done a pretty good job so far."

"Right. That's the next question." She turned to the chief engineer. "Baumstark, can we manage with the one centrifuge?"

"No, miss. Torque."

"Then how about repairs?"

BAUMSTARK glanced around resignedly, wet his lips and shrugged.

"Dozens of rotors and stators either gone or badly weakened. Probably two hundred replacements necessary. We have a few spares, that's all. I—I don't see how it's possible for us to get the *Ark* moving, miss."

There was profound silence. Strike's heart dropped to his boots as he thought of Kurtt speeding to triumph with the fruits of their labors. Then he grinned wryly.

"Did I hear something just then?"

Gerry raised her lovely, troubled face and gazed at him inquiringly.

"I think that third out just whizzed past us into the shortstop's mitt."

Of all the women in the System, Gerry Carlyle was probably the least prone to accept an adverse decision without bitter protest. She would doubtless start an argument with St. Peter, claiming it was undemocratic to force a new angel to wear a halo and strum corny tunes on a harp against her will. Hence, though the greatest Umpire of all seemed to be calling them against her, Gerry vowed to go down swinging.

Before any sense of defeatism could overcome her men, she was snapping orders with her accustomed spirit. In the *Ark's* tiny workshop was a small electric induction furnace. Gerry had that brought outside. Then she dispatched four men with ore-finding doodlebugs. The latest development not only located bodies of metallic ores, but also, by registering infinitesimal differences of electrical resistance, in-

dicated what kind of metal was present.

A powerful alloy had to be used to withstand the terrific speeds of the centrifuges. Only a combination of strong but light beryllium and the densely strong but heavy neutroxite, not found on Earth, could be used. These had to be found by the ore hunters.

There were other difficulties, though. Baumstark seemed to draw them from his helmet like a magician. The first was the fact that to smelt ores, their induction furnace would eat a tremendous amount of amperes. So much power could never be provided by the generator that operated the lights in the *Ark*.

"Rewind the generator," was Gerry's reply.

Then Baumstark pointed out that they hadn't a source of power sufficient to keep that generator moving to produce the necessary amperes. Tommy Strike solved this one.

"Steam," he said. "Haul out one of those tanks we use to carry aquatic specimens and set it up as a boiler. Just beyond that pass there, about half a mile away, there's a forest of some sort. Leafless trees in all kinds of queer geometric shapes. Perfect for firewood. I saw no evidence of water on Titan while we were scouting around, but we can fix a trap that will save most of our steam. So we'll be able to use the same water over and over again."

The ease with which obstacles were overcome by the ingenuity of the captain and crew of the *Ark* inspired a cumulative feeling of irresistibility in all of them. Gerry glowed with pride. This was the result of her careful selection, severe discipline, rigid training, and years of constant reminder that every possible contingency should be anticipated.

Under some circumstances, she might even have welcomed this challenge to her ability and self-sufficiency. But the terrible threat of Kurtt—which paradoxically loomed larger the farther he sped from them—left no time for any complacency.

One thing was lacking before they could commence their work, and it was

found within the hour. The ore hunters came charging into camp with a gleam of triumph in their eyes, like that of a Forty-niner who had struck the mother lode. Both beryllium and neutroxite had been located nearby, practically on the surface of the ground. It would be a comparatively simple matter to mine it in quantity.

Gerry at once parceled out the various jobs, and work commenced furiously. At that particular season of the Titanian year, the satellite was illuminated by either the Sun or Saturn for three-fourths of its day. Hence, by working shifts, the crew of the *Ark* lost little time because of darkness.

The only delays were caused by unforeseen difficulties. The first occurred at the slanting shaft drilled into the hillside, following a vein of almost pure neutroxite. Returning to work after the first short night, the men found the stope had collapsed. Gerry's examination revealed that four holes, about six inches in diameter and close together, had been bored low in the wall of the shaft, weakening it to the point of breakdown. The holes were smooth as glass, and apparently continued into the very bowels of Titan.

"If none of you fellows dug these holes," observed Gerry, "then they must have been made by a burrowing animal of some kind. I'll stick around while you work and see if I can't spot our hecklers."

Digging continued, with men lugging sacks of the heavy ore back to the *Ark*. The light gravity enabled them to handle what would have been hundreds of pounds on Earth. Presently a muffled, whirring sound came from inside the tunnel, and the workmen popped out in a hurry. Gerry, heat ray in hand, set herself at the tunnel mouth.

At the rear came a sudden flurry of rock dust, and a remarkable creature burst into view. It was about the size of a woodchuck, but quite round. Its mouth was set precisely in the center of its head, perfectly circular, and was armed with a formidable set of teeth. Two tiny eyes glittered deep in their furry sockets. Balancing upright like a weighted doll, it stared solemnly at Gerry Carlyle.

The girl moved forward quietly, hop-

ing to capture it by the scruff of the neck. Immediately the animal turned to face the wall of the cave. A number of little flippers, placed at haphazard spots all over its body, sprang into view. The creature began to spin in a clockwise motion at a furious rate, literally boring into the ground with its terrific teeth. In ten seconds the strange creature had vanished.

It was Kranz, peering in astonishment over Gerry's shoulder, who named it in a burst of inspiration.

"Call it a Rotary Mole!"

CHAPTER VII

Mystery of Life

THE Rotary Moles—there were four in the local family—proved quite a nuisance with their constant burrowing into the mine shaft. When driven out, they sat around staring curiously at the operations like so many sidewalk superintendents watching an excavation. In desperation, Gerry was forced to devise a method of capturing them.

She abhorred the wanton killing of wild life, which rendered useless her high-powered hypodermic rifles. They would destroy any animal as small as the Mole. Also, the anesthetic gas dispersed too quickly in the thin Titanian air to be of much good.

After brooding awhile over a method to catch the things harmlessly, one of the men gave Gerry the clue. To scare the Moles away, he threw a half-empty can at them. They darted off, then came racing back to the splotch where the pineapple juice had soaked into the ground. At once they all up-ended and began to spin, boring madly into the damp spot. Unquestionably they had a passion for fruit juices.

That made it easy. Gerry built a box trap and filled it with soil. Then she set it out the second night and emptied two cans of juice on it. The next morning they had four Rotary Moles in a sadly battered trap. Another hour would have enabled them to win to freedom.

"What a testimonial for the pine-

apple people!" Gerry gloated, as she stowed the Rotary Moles out of harm's way. "They ought to be glad to pay plenty for it."

After the boiler-generator-furnace hook-up had begun to function, another interruption occurred. The first batch of neutroxite had been poured into sand molds. The smelting of more ore was proceeding satisfactorily, when the electricity unaccountably weakened. Checking along the wires from the generator to the furnace, Strike found what appeared to be a rather slender copper bar lying across the wires. With the toe of his boot he kicked it aside.

Three minutes later there was another short in the circuit. Tommy again was forced to remove the apparent copper bar from the wires. This time, after kicking it away, he bent down to pick it up. He received a mild electric shock. When he dropped the thing hastily, the copper bar began to walk away.

"So," murmured Strike grimly. "You want to play."

He pursued the perambulating bar. It ducked swiftly into the pile of wood used to fire up the boiler. With one sweep Strike spread the fuel about the landscape, but there was no copper bar to be seen.

He began to swear softly as he peered around. Gerry, fascinated by his antics, came over.

"What goes on now?" she demanded.

Strike explained briefly.

"It must be a sort of chameleonlike thing," he concluded. "First it imitated the wires. Now it's imitating the sticks of wood. Probably generates a current within itself like an electric eel. Maybe if we wait around, it'll move again."

Gerry snorted in exasperation.

"And no doubt it amuses and warms itself by shorting our wires at every opportunity. Another monkey-wrench in the machinery that we'll have to dig out."

Carefully they began to sort the woodpile, searching for a stick that would give them a mild jolt. A loud complaint from Baumstark warned them. Behind their backs, the chameleon had sneaked over to absorb the juice from the furnace lead-ins again.

They tried to surround the thing, which now resembled a copper bar. But

it scuttled away lizard-fashion much too rapidly to be caught. Thoroughly annoyed by these alarming delays, Gerry said reluctantly:

"We've got no time to waste in studying that little beggar, and find out how to capture it. If I don't get an inspiration within an hour or two, we'll just have to kill it outright."

FORTUNATELY the inspiration came. In Gerry's quarters was a large mirror, her one concession to feminine vanity while on expedition. This she carried outside and set up alongside the chameleon's favorite spot—the electric wires—tilting it so it would reflect nothing but the dark-blue sky.

The third brief night passed, and Gerry awoke to the sound of hilarious laughter. Hurrying out, she found Tommy guffawing and pointing inarticulately. The chameleon, in its natural state looked like an ordinary chunk of flesh with legs. It lay twisting futilely before the mirror, sputtering feeble electric sparks. Part of it was blue as the sky, while the rest shaded into a rapidly shifting mottled color.

"The poor devil tried at first to imitate nothing, looking up at space," Strike explained finally. "Then it must've caught sight of its reflection in the mirror and tried to imitate itself! The natural result was a complete nervous breakdown!"

After this interlude, nothing arose to interrupt their work. Metals were smelted, poured into molds. Emery-wheels howled as the little rotors were ground smooth. Before long they were ready to be welded into place in the matrix of the huge centrifuge. That was when they faced the most appalling complication of all. It was found impossible to weld the rotors!

"It's the beryllium, miss," explained Baumstark worriedly. "We used only moderate heat to smelt it. That was okay. We had to use a terrific temperature to smelt the neutroxite. That was okay, too. But now, in order to weld, we have to use enough heat to affect the neutroxite, and it's too much for the beryllium. It just oxidizes away. We need a flux, and it can't be made."

After everything had been going so well, for this apparently unsurmount-

able obstacle to arise was almost enough to drive even a Gerry Carlyle to tears. Had she finally made the fatal mistake that all adventurers sooner or later commit?

When she had chosen Titan to land upon, rather than the outer satellites, she had made a gamble. By going to Iapetus or Phoebe, it might have been possible to cram the life-boats with rocket fuel, leaving room for only one person to pilot. With skillful navigation and great luck, some of them might have been able to make the Jovian satellites, and the mining outpost on Ganymede, to organize a rescue party for those left on Titan. Instead, Gerry had characteristically decided to shoot for big stakes. It was a wager—complete repair of the *Ark* and triumph in the race with Kurtt, against annihilation. She had wanted all or nothing.

And for the first time Gerry Carlyle knew the sick, stifling sensation of despair.

But there was one last trump in her hand. Gerry still had the notes in Murray's diary concerning a civilized race on Titan, with remarkable skill in the use of metals. If those people were still on Titan, perhaps they could help. If they were gone, as Strike's report of a deserted city would indicate, perhaps the castaways could read from the ruins something that might be of assistance to them.

There was still fuel left in one life-boat, so Gerry, Strike, and Lieutenant Barrows piled in. They took off with a roar, heading straight "north" for the city Tommy had seen earlier. After swiftly covering about six miles, they sighted it. Half a mile from its limits

was a level plain, and there Strike set the rocket ship down gently.

AT a cautious distance the trio examined the strange city. It appeared to have been built for a population of approximately twenty thousand, by Earthly standards. It had been constructed on the basis of some baffling, alien geometry. The designs resembled the geometry of man, but the patterns just evaded complete comprehension, barricading themselves in the mind just beyond the borderline of full meaning. All around its edges, the city was crumbling to ruin. It was as if some invisible monster of decay were slowly eating toward the center, which was still in excellent repair. And in all that weirdly beautiful expanse, not a single living thing moved. Barrows broke the quiet.

"Isn't it incredible how persistent and unconquerable life is? We find it everywhere, under the most terrible conditions—the inferno of Mercury, the stewpot of Venus, and crawling under tons of pressure on Saturn. Now even on this barren rock, a great civilization evolved. Those Arrhenius spores sure got around, didn't they?"

Gerry smiled. "I doubt if what we see out there actually evolved on this empty ball of stone. Probably it came from some other universe, many eons in the past. Shall we explore it without waiting for reinforcements?"

There was no dissenting voice. Gerry always meted out harsh punishments for infractions of her safety-first rules, but now time was working swiftly against them. Besides, the place looked so deserted, there seemed to be no rea-

[Turn page]



son for the usual caution.

So they moved into the city. Their first discovery was that it had been built for a race of beings smaller than humans, making it seem like a large-scale model of a city. Doorways were five feet in height, windows in proportion. Oddly, there were neither doors nor window panes, suggesting utter indifference to temperature changes. Nor were the buildings, save for a few curiously graven towers, more than three stories in height.

As the group walked slowly toward the heart of the city, they found it in a remarkable state of preservation. The streets were clean, totally devoid of rubble or dust. It almost seemed as if the place were waiting patiently for the return of its masters, and was tended daily by some mysterious, invisible presence. The echoes of their booted feet rattled in the emptiness.

Gradually, as Gerry led her scouts into the center of the city, a curious feeling began to oppress them. They felt the gradually increasing certainty that they were not alone. They paused irresolutely, every nerve on the alert. Did they really hear that stealthy rustling in the depths of the mysterious, darkened apartments? A cautious peek within showed strangely malformed furniture, but no living thing.

"I don't like this," said Gerry uncomfortably, one hand on her heat ray gun. "Perhaps—"

The brassy clangor of a mighty gong shattered the stillness with two tremendous, shivering notes. Gerry, Strike, and Barrows raced in a breathless sprint for open country. With wild, awkward bounds that broke Olympic records at every leap, they scrambled and sailed like jumping-jacks running amuck. They didn't stop for breath till they were out of the city and safe beside their little rocket ship.

WHEN they looked back through the grayish daylight, they received an even greater shock. The city was alive! Peopled with bipeds moving about the streets, in and out of buildings, it was just like any normal town. The change was so abrupt, the terrestrial explorers gaped at the city, then at each other. They were too

shocked to talk. All they could do was gulp stupidly.

Gerry was first to recover the use of her voice. She used it to get in radio communication with the *Ark*.

"Listen carefully, Kranz," she ordered. "We've discovered civilized life here. There's not much rocket fuel left. So instead of our coming back in the life-boat, I want you to lead a reinforcement party. Head straight north, through that little pass. But first go to my room and look in the locker behind the door. On the top shelf you'll find a contraption that looks like a half-dozen wired bowls attached to a power unit. Bring it out, and take along a new supply of oxygen bottles."

Instead of settling down to wait, Strike unhooked his binoculars for a long look at the city's inhabitants.

"They're nothing to be afraid of," he decided. "They're less than five feet tall, slender, delicately built. Besides, didn't Murray say they were friendly? They'll probably recognize us as humans, just like Murray. Come on. Let's pay 'em a visit now."

Gerry dubiously agreed, so the trio moved back toward the city. They were met at its edge by a group of four Titanians. As Strike had said, they were frail, uniform in height to the last millimeter, and entirely hairless. They were dressed in a metallic cloth which was wound around them like mummies' wrappings. It was obvious that they dressed for modesty rather than comfort, however, for their flesh was tough and hard.

Their features were generally human. Instead of ears, though, there were four filaments sprouting from each side of the head, and shaped like a lyre.

"Be nice to 'em," Gerry cautioned. "Remember, their good will may be our last hope."

CHAPTER VIII

Monster of Evil

ONE of the Titanians stepped forward with a graceful waving of hands, a low bow.

"Mradna luaow," he said politely.

Tommy grinned, also bowing ludicrously.

"You don't say! Republican or Democrat?"

The Titanian smiled unmistakably, bowing more rapidly than a Japanese diplomat. Pointing to Gerry, he said:

"Ree yura norom."

"That's what I've always said,"

Tommy agreed amiably. "Great kid. But she needs a man around to keep her from getting hysterical."

He blocked a playful punch from his fiancée. After a few more exchanges of pleasantries, the Titanians led the castaways into the city.

It was entirely different this time, filled with the quiet hum of life. Vehicles moved silently and swiftly through the streets, though neither wheels nor motive power were visible. Occasionally they caught glimpses of a form of escalator inside the buildings. Throughout their tour, the strange people never once gave vent to any expression of surprise at sight of the visitors from Earth.

"They're the most super-polite race I've ever seen," Strike said uncomfortably. "In fact, too much so. They have the exaggerated formality and worship of mannerism of a decadent people."

Gerry, slightly startled at this penetrating comment, agreed.

"Yes, the aura of decay does seem to saturate the place. A pity, too. They're such nice little men."

The tour of inspection, instead of clarifying, simply added more mysteries. There was no indication whatever of any central source of power generation or machinery. And nowhere did they see anyone at work. Titanian life seemed to be one long round of quiet amusement and leisure.

The journey ended before one of the Titanian apartments. Gerry and Strike entered, leaving Barrows outside to watch for Kranz. They found the odd furniture strangely comfortable, but were inconvenienced by the low ceiling and lack of light. Evidently the Titanians could see in the dark better than cats. Food was offered, but it was a case of one man's meat being another's poison. It made both of them temporarily sick.

Gerry picked up a vase-shaped object, beautifully molded of metal, though incredibly light. She tried to break it between her hands, then hammered it savagely on the wall.

"Not a dent!" she exclaimed in awe. "The stuff is some kind of alloy, too. Tommy, these people do have a secret that will enable us to repair the *Ark*! If we can only learn it—"

They looked at one another with rising excitement.

To kill time, Strike amused himself hugely with silly antics. First he entertained the astonished Titanians with feats of strength that were quite simple in the reduced gravity. Then he tried to find a common denominator in his attempts to communicate with signs. He was less successful in this.

During this display, he made one disturbing discovery. There was a ragged, apparently bottomless hole in the floor at the back of the room. A nauseating odor rose from it, suggestive of nameless evil.

FINALLY Kranz arrived with five other crew members. Strike, Gerry and Barrows took the oxygen bottles that were offered then. Then Gerry seized the apparatus which actually resembled a series of bowls joined by wires.

"Now!" she exclaimed in triumph. "Now we can really talk to these people."

Her statement created a sensation, and the entire party crowded into the apartment. The Titanians seemed delighted at the prospect of entertaining this bunch of overdressed, muscular, hairy guests. They listened with every evidence of profound interest as Gerry expounded the principles of the gadget she held in her hands.

"This is a thought helmet," she declared, with an air of defying anyone to contradict her. She held up one of the bowl-like metal things. "It's an invention of my cousin Elmer at Federal Tech. It has built-in headphones, and contains a compact power unit. Thought, of course, is a delicate electrical wave that's generated by the atoms of the brain. When the companion piece to this helmet is placed on the head of another person, each acts

as a super-sensitive receiver of mutual electrical thought impulses."

Strike made the mistake of offering an argument.

"So what? After you pick up your impulses, they'd have to be reproduced in your own brain. Did Elmer think of that?"

"Elmer has thought of everything," Gerry replied bitingly, "except how to deal with impertinent interruptions. May I continue, please?"

"Um."

"The impulses received are greatly amplified in the coils of these helmets. By electrical induction, they set up similar impulses in the brain of anyone who wears the helmet. So the wearer experiences the exact thoughts he has tuned in." Gerry donned one of the helmets. Then, approaching one of the Titanians, she induced him by politely gentle signs to emulate her example. There were three other helmets with lead-ins to Gerry's master helmet.

"These," she explained, "are one-way receivers. You can hear what goes on, but your own thoughts are not broadcast. Otherwise there'd be an awful jumble. Here, Tommy, Barrows, Kranz ... All set?"

Carefully Gerry threw a switch in her helmet and then the Titanian's.

A faint humming sounded, but that was all. There were no thought impulses. Strike began to grin.

"I think I could beat Elmer just with my sign language."

Gerry sighed. "My, aren't we the impatient one, though!" The terrible uncertainty and lack of time reflected in her voice as sarcasm. "Human thought waves, my love, range within a narrow band of wave lengths. We must stay within that range to hear thoughts. Each brain has an infinitely fine difference from every other brain. We have to tune in."

She began to twist a sunken vernier dial on the Titanian's helmet, broadcasting a repetition of a single thought:

"We wish to be your friends. We wish to be your friends."

The three men also twisted their dials and simultaneously picked up Gerry's unspoken thought. The expressions on their faces were ludicrous. But before they could say anything, the Ti-

tanian's features also registered amazement and pleasure. He bowed and fluttered his hands ingratiatingly. Gerry raised her eyebrows in triumph.

"Now to tune in on our friend. I'll speak my thoughts aloud, so all you need to do is get on the Titanian wave length."

THERE was a moment of silent dial-twisting, and then the Titanian's thoughts came in with sudden strength.

"So happy to welcome the strange bipeds. Our homes, our sustenance, our lives are at your disposal."

This had the sound of ritual rather than a genuine offer. Gerry cut her switch momentarily and turned exultantly to Strike.

"Just think! We're in contact with an intelligent race, with all their customs, science, literature, and intellectual progress. Probably the culture of a planet from another universe. Why, a few weeks here may open up undreamed-of avenues of research in all lines of human endeavor!"

"We haven't got weeks to spare," interjected Strike. "Remember Kurtt?"

"Um, yes. Kurtt and the race."

Gerry suddenly looked harassed at this reminder that their lives depended upon her tact and ingenuity. She started to reestablish thought contact with the Titanian, but was interrupted by the booming gong that had frightened them earlier in the day.

The Titanians all spread their hands regretfully, mouthing their incomprehensible syllables. Gerry snapped the switch just in time to catch the end of the explanation.

"It is the Time of Offering now. We must retire. Please do not go away. We shall awaken shortly. Our homes are yours."

Bowing ingratiatingly, the Titanians lay down upon their curiously constructed beds and instantly dropped into a coma. All through the buildings came the rustling, pattering sound of thousands of tiny feet. The party from the *Ark* watched in wary bewilderment. The tension was snapped by Gerry's gasp.

"Look there—coming up through the hole in the floor!"

It was a hideously malformed little

devil that stared around with bright, beady eyes at the intruders, then popped out into the room. It stood about three feet high, in appearance much like a sea-horse. At the base of the nauseous, scaly body there were four short legs, ending in hoofs. The creature seemed top-heavy. Just as the Titanians were the epitome of kindness, this thing was stark evil.

"No sudden moves, boys," Gerry ordered in quiet tones. "This monkey looks as if he could be pretty mean."

There was intelligence in the beast's eyes as it surveyed the unexpected situation. Abruptly the slender snout opened and it hissed, long and piercingly. It also recognized a foe.

War had been declared.

THE group from the *Ark* pressed slowly back to await developments. There was something mysterious, unexplained. They wanted to learn the vital elements of the situation before deciding on a course of action.

The monster apparently took this withdrawal as capitulation, and promptly went about its business, ignoring the others. The hoofs made a faintly disturbing clop-clop as it crossed the room to bend over one of the sleeping Titanians. From its snout protruded a long, thin extension that was almost needlelike. Before anyone could speak or interrupt, it was plunged into the throat of the Titanian!

Action erupted in a swift flurry. Someone had his heat ray out in a flash, hurling a soundless, searing bolt. The monster doubled up in quick pain, nipping at the glowing spot on its horny hide. Then it turned, hissing viciously as if charged.

Cool and efficient, Gerry instantly took command.

"Concentrated heat beam," she ordered calmly. "Its armor is too strong for diffused rays."

As she spoke, she had her own weapon unsheathed and adjusted with a single swift motion. While the monster drove at them, Gerry emotionlessly drilled it twice and stepped out of the path of the plunging body like a graceful bull-fighter. It crashed against the front wall and collapsed, smoking from half a dozen heat ray blasts.

Immediately after the brief scuffle, two more ugly devils magically popped up into the room. For a moment it looked like real trouble in the confining, narrow room. The leading Titanian, however, stirred restlessly and raised himself on one elbow. He was groggy, like a bear roused from hibernation. But he managed to convey by gestures of negation that Gerry and the hunters were to do nothing to interrupt. Then he heavily dropped back on the couch and sank into a coma again.

"He wants us to lay off, men," Gerry said in bewilderment. "Evidently this sort of thing goes on all the time. Maybe he isn't being hurt, and will tell us about it when he awakens. This whole business, though—" She shook her head. "It absolutely beats me."

The new monsters methodically went about plunging their needlelike tongues into the sleeping Titanians' exposed throats. Gerry repressed a shudder, turned sharply away. She found Strike making the most of the opportunity to study the body of the dead one.

"Find out anything?"

"A little," he said abstractedly. "For one thing, this tonguelike jigger is sharp and bony. Also it's hollow, like a hypodermic needle. And the cheeks inside are lined with pouches that're partially filled with some oily stuff."

Gerry forced herself to wait patiently while the ugly little monsters came in three relays to gouge at the necks of the helpless Titanians. Finally they disappeared for good, and the vague scurrying-sounds all over the city died away to silence. This in turn was broken by the double note of the deep-toned gong.

The three Titanians awoke, bright-eyed and seemingly refreshed, to turn graciously again to their guests.

CHAPTER IX

Children of Esau

EAGERLY Gerry donned the thought helmet once more, placing the corresponding helmet upon the leading Titanian. Gone now were all

thoughts of delving into the mysteries of an ancient and dying civilization. Even the urgency of their terrible predicament faded momentarily before the importance of learning the queer relationship between the Titanians and the monsters.

"They are the Gora," came the Titanian thought waves, anticipating Gerry's questions. "They are native to this world."

"Which means that you're not?"

"No. Many ages ago, the Old Ones came here from a far star. There was death on our original home, though I know little about it. When we arrived here, our presence was resented by the Gora. But their catacombs were underground, and we did not interfere much with one another. Then it was discovered by the Gora that we people have a strange gland in our bodies—"

The Titanian lifted his chin to expose his throat. There was an opening there, reddened from the recent mistreatment.

"Formerly, when our race was expanding, our artisans worked miracles with metals by virtue of the secretion from this gland. Now, however, there is no longer any need to build, and that secret has been lost."

A thrill of excitement passed through the *Ark's* crew.

"So to us the gland is a vestigial organ of no value. But to the Gora, the secretion serves not only as food and drink, but as valuable plastic material for many uses. From the moment they learned this, there was constant warfare between us. Raiding parties of the Gora would lie in wait for incautious individuals, or occasionally make daring night raids into our homes. Once captured, a Titanian was rarely seen again live. He was doomed to a ghastly slavery far underground, a living death.

"We, in our turn, fought back with powerful weapons. Poison gases were released in the burrows of the Gora. Traps were set. But in the end, superior intelligence solved the terrible problem. To end the futile, destructive warfare, we as the dominant race made a pact with the inferior Gora. After all, the glandular secretion was of no particular importance to us. So we

agreed that twice every planetary revolution we would set aside a brief period.

"During that time, the Gora are permitted to come up from below and replenish their supplies of the secretion. This period, known as the Time of Offering, is marked by the great gong. In return, the Gora agreed to take over all manual duties in running the city and keeping it in a fine state of repair. They clean our homes, operate all our machines, while we are free to engage in cultural pursuits and enjoy the more abundant life. Thus, by virtue of intellect, we have relegated the Gora to the status of our slaves.

"They are utterly dependent upon our glandular gifts. They must appease our every whim or suffer the consequences. We have a falling birth rate, which you may have guessed from the fact that the outer portions of our city are no longer in use. This fact also strengthens our dominant position."

STRIKE and Gerry exchanged a long look of profound horror.

"What a monstrous bargain!" burst out Gerry in dismay.

Barrows smiled uncomfortably. "Why, the idiots actually think they put over a fast one! Why don't they look around? Can't they see the evidences of mental and moral decay, the results of easy living? Dominant race! The Gora give them a few concessions and grab off the secretion—the most precious thing they have."

"Poor little children of Esau," said Gerry somberly. "They sold their birthright for a mess of pottage."

The Titanian, able to get only Gerry's thoughts, bowed politely.

"I am sorry. I do not understand."

Gerry removed her helmet, cradling it in her arm.

"I have an orange grove back in California," she said with apparent irrelevancy. "We have a lot of trouble with ants."

"Aunts?" queried Strike. "Troublesome relatives?"

"Ants. Those creatures that get into everything with amazing persistence."

"That describes my female relatives, all right."

"No, I'm serious, Tommy. Ants have an astonishingly complicated and well developed economy. They take plant-lice and carry them up to the tender young leaves of the citrus trees. They let the insect cows extract the vital juices of the plant. Then the ants return and stroke them with their feelers to induce them to exude this juice. The ants promptly harvest it and take it down into their formicaries. They handle aphides the way human beings handle cows, tending them and 'milk-ing' them. Any encroachment upon their little system—ladybird beetles, for instance, eat aphides—is met with fierce resistance."

"I get the analogy. This relationship between Titanian and Gora is a parallel case. The Gora are pretty antlike in habits, at that. Symbiosis."

There was a lengthy silence while the politely attentive Titanian looked from face to face, trying to interpret the expressions of pity and sorrow. Again, more heavily than ever, came the pressure of their desperate situation and the need for swift action. But it was sharpened now by the knowledge that a possible solution to their troubles was at hand.

Gerry slipped on her thought helmet again. In her most diplomatic manner, she began to dicker for a supply of the probably vital glandular secretion. The Titanian's answering thoughts were evasive, regretfully negative. With a great show of deprecating hand-waving, he indicated that this would be a technical violation of their pact with the Gora. No amount of urging or offers of barter could move him.

Strike suddenly leaned over and snapped off the switch on Gerry's helmet.

"Before you start losing your temper," he urged, "and alienate them for good— Look. It's obvious they're scared stiff of what the Gora might do in retaliation. The stuff about violating their pact is just a pretext. And if they're scared, there's no persuading 'em. So I have an idea. Let's call this visit quits for today, and I'll tell you later what I'm planning."

The distant Sun had already disappeared, and Saturn bulged low on the horizon. Gerry made excuses, refus-

ing to impose upon Titanian hospitality further. She promised to return the next day to resume the interesting conversation. Escorted by the unbelievably gracious Titanians, who were visibly relieved at the change of subject, Gerry and her men marched toward the hills where their rocket ship lay.

THE life-boat barely managed to accommodate the entire party. There appeared to be just sufficient fuel left to carry them back to the *Ark*. Gerry, before taking off, twisted around to speak.

"Would it be too much to ask just what's on your mind, my sweet?"

Strike smiled. "Skip the sarcasm, kitten. Here's the way I see it. We aren't sure yet whether this Titanian stuff will help or not. That's the first thing we must know. After that, maybe we'll have reason to battle for it."

"And how will we find out?"

Strike took from his shirt the decapitated head of the slain Gora and waved it aloft triumphantly.

"There's a sample of the stuff inside the cheek-pouches of this thing. It'll be enough for Baumstark to make a test."

It didn't take long, back at the *Ark*, for the chief engineer to grasp what was wanted. He promptly disappeared into the engine room with welding apparatus in one hand and a cupful of the all-important secretion in the other, searching for rotors and matrix upon which to experiment. A reddish glow flickered and shadows danced. Finally Baumstark reappeared. His grin was so wide that he dropped the oxygen tube from his mouth. He held up thumb and forefinger in a circle, squinting through it in glee.

"Perfect!" he gloated. "It works perfectly!"

Beyond question, the secret of the ancient Titanians' genius with metals lay in their glandular secretion, which acted as a miraculous flux. It lowered the melting point of neutroxite far below beryllium's danger point, fusing the alloy rotors onto their matrix beautifully.

There was a swift gabble of explanations from the scouting party to the crew members who had stayed with the

Ark. Then Baumstark posed a sombre question.

"I'll need quite a lot of this stuff for the welding job. Can you get it?"

"That's why I wanted to get you away from there before explaining my plan, Gerry," Strike said. "I was afraid the Titanian might read your thoughts while I told you what I intend to do. We'll have to scrape together every hypodermic syringe in the Ark, improvise some if we can't find enough. Then back we go tomorrow. When the Time of Offering comes again, we enter and help ourselves."

"It must be done without the Titanians' knowledge, of course. They're too scared of their 'inferior' neighbors to risk any violation of their pact. And naturally we've got to give those little devils, the Gora, something to think about in the meantime."

Excitement ran like electricity through the crew. Darkness came, blackly impenetrable. But hope, which had burned only as a dim spark, now flamed into a blazing beacon. With courage and skill, they might yet save themselves.

WHEN dawn came, Strike laid out his plan of campaign. Gerry willingly let him take full command.

There were two proton cannon in the Ark itself, but they were huge. In those days, it still took a vast machine to produce an effective stream of subatomic bullets. So Strike detailed one squad to remain with the ship, using the proton cannon to protect their final stronghold, in case the coming war should be carried to that extreme.

The last dregs of rocket fuel in the life-boats had now been used up, so the raid had to be carried out on foot. Eighteen of the crew, including Gerry and Strike, formed themselves in groups of three. One was equipped with hypodermics and containers for the vital fluid, the other two armed to the teeth. The rest of the men made a skeleton squad to be posted midway between the Ark and the city of the Titanians, prepared to fight, a rear guard action if necessary.

"This may go off quietly, without a hitch," said Strike. "I hope it does. But if we have to fight—and it's our

lives we'll be fighting for—I mean to put up a real scrap."

Timing their approach to arrive shortly before the morning Time of Offering, Gerry Carlyle and Tommy Strike led their little party over the six miles of barren, trailless badlands and into the Titanian city. Though they were gripped by interest and excitement, their expressions demonstrated their grim determination to carry off the coup successfully. They knew the penalty for failure. It was death—if not by the Gora, then by scarcely less horrible thirst or starvation. There was little water on the satellite, and the food of the Titanians had proved unsuited to human consumption. They had to win or die.

Gerry was met by apparently the same Titanian trio who had entertained them the previous day. They were still as smiling and ingratiating as ever. A faint qualm stirred her conscience.

"My only real regret," she said, "is that we can't stay and uncover the secrets that lie hidden in this ancient city."

"Don't forget Kurtt," reminded Tommy. "He must be a third of the way back to Earth by now."

"I remember. But don't worry about the race. We may not win, but it's a foregone conclusion that Kurtt won't, either."

"Your inspired logic escapes me. However, I agree that there's plenty around to interest us here. Too bad we can't put off this job of having to fight for our lives. Maybe we can return some day and dig around a little. Yeah—maybe!"

CHAPTER X

Hotfoot on a Frigid World

THE party was well into the occupied portion of the city. The Titanian began gently hinting by signs that he wished to communicate through the thought helmet. Strike quickly assigned each squad to a street-level apartment, urging them to be alert for the signal. Oxygen bottles were fastened to the men's belts to leave their

hands free. The dull booming sound of the gong came at once.

The Titanians as usual conveyed infinite regret that they should be forced to leave their guests. It was a rudeness that pained them deeply. Strike bowed and waved his hands understandingly, watched them disappear.

"Now!" he shouted.

The squads scattered on their assignments. Strike, Gerry and young Barrows darted into the nearest apartment. The Titanians had already composed themselves in their deep slumber.

Swiftly Gerry whipped out an enormous hypodermic and went to work. While Barrows held the container, she shot stream after stream of the sticky ichor into it, exsiccating the gland. Strike seized the smallest piece of furniture in the room, a queer device shaped somewhat like a piano stool. He strode to the hole in the floor and listened.

Like a distant waterfall came the rush of thousands of little feet. The miniature thunder rolled nearer and nearer. Then he heard something scrambling just beyond the limit of his vision in the black pit. A horrid snout poked sharply into view—

"Down you go!" shouted Strike.

He slammed down the stool-like contraption on the protruding head. The Gora vanished with an agonized hiss. The hole was completely blocked by the stool.

Gerry and Barrows glanced about apprehensively. Reassured by Strike's confident grimace, they turned to the second sleeping Titanian. Underneath the stool a Gora was hammering and pushing, but they were no match for Strike's weight and strength. One bony, needlelike tongue jabbed clear through the bottom of the obstruction. Strike promptly snapped it off with a vicious blow.

All over the city now, the sounds of uproar began. The Gora who had been blockaded had evidently spread the news. Enraged monsters were erupting from unclosed holes and converging upon the source of the disturbance. Just as Gerry started to work upon the third of the Titanians, four of the beasts rushed through the doorway, hissing with fury.

Strike calmly picked up a huge table and with one hand scaled it across the room. The resulting carnage gave him a lot of pleasure. He sat upon the up-ended stool, still blocking the hole, and drew two guns.

"What was that yarn about the tailor's boy who killed seven with one blow? I'm not doing so badly myself."

His heat ray licked out once, twice. For the time being, six dead Gora effectively barricaded the entrance. Gerry hurriedly finished her work, tossed the hypodermic aside. Barrows sealed the precious can of fluid.

"All set?" asked Strike reluctantly.

As Gerry nodded, the reptilian tangle of dead bodies burst inward under a new assault. Gora began to stream in. Coolly the three began to fire, backing toward a window that led to the street. The deadly sniping quickly stalled the attack. The odor of burning flesh filled the room. The Titanians, aroused by the clamor, lurched about. Still half-asleep, they wrung their hands in futile distress.

BARROWS slipped through the window first. His disappearance was marked by an exclamation of pain and anger. Gerry and Strike, piling through after him, found the lieutenant battling ferociously. Blood streamed from a slash across his forehead and welled slowly from two stabs on his left arm. He was encircled by twitching, dead and dying Gora.

The remaining squads from the Ark were converging rapidly upon the central rendezvous, fighting deadly rear-guard actions. Swiftly Strike counted his forces.

"Only seventeen!" he snapped. "Who's missing?"

It was Kranz, a veteran of the Carlyle adventures from the very first expedition. Dead or not, he couldn't be left behind. Without a backward glance, Strike asked which apartment Kranz had been in. Then he yelled a fierce battle-cry.

"Come on, gang. Let's go!"

In a single mighty bound, he leaped clear over the encircling Gora and dashed for the indicated building. He vanished inside. After momentary hesitation, four of the crew jumped after

him. The structure trembled with the fury of the battle within. Then Strike reappeared with the bleeding, semi-conscious Kranz over one shoulder.

The additional weight made it impossible for Strike to return by jumping over the enemy. But he peeled back his lips in a fighting snarl and rushed with reckless fury, his two guns spitting deadly heat beams. For a minute the Gora seemed on the verge of overwhelming him. But just before they succeeded, they broke in confused panic before the advance of that terrible engine of destruction. They fled, hissing and squealing.

Strike and the others rejoined Gerry. Kranz still dangled over his shoulder.

"Now's our chance," panted Strike, between draughts from his oxygen bottle. "Make our run for it while they're disorganized. Ready? What's the matter with you?"

Gerry stood staring at Strike with her lips parted, her eyes shining. She was experiencing that strange emotion—a compound of awe, fright and admiration—that every woman knows when she sees the man she loves in two-fisted action.

"Anything wrong?" demanded Strike.

"No, Tommy," she replied obediently.

"Then get going."

"Yes, Tommy."

Gerry led the way out of the city. They ran laxly, with the gliding, ground-hugging stride that saves energy and covers space on low-gravity worlds. They crossed the plain and were well into the hills, within sight of the small party waiting there, before the Gora took up the chase. Without pause, Gerry's group kept right on going. It was their first and only duty to get the flux back to the Ark.

Twenty minutes of steady jogging brought them three miles of the way. Exhausted, they called a brief halt. Flinging themselves down on the ground, they sucked at their oxygen bottles avidly. But the bottles had been drawn upon heavily during the mad flight across Titan. Now they were nearly empty. Everyone made the discovery at once. Promptly they closed the valves, consciously forcing

themselves to modulate their heavy breathing. It was not too successful. A dozen ordinary breaths left their lungs starving for oxygen.

Strike rose slowly.

"No time for rest, I guess. My fault for not caching a supply of bottles on the trail somewhere. Got to keep moving as long as possible. Save as much oxygen as you can for a final dash."

THEY were still one-fourth of the way from the ship when the embattled rear-guard caught up with them. Blue-faced from lack of oxygen, not one of them was without wounds. They had been trapped in a cul-de-sac and forced to storm their way out. Without oxygen reserves, and bleeding from cuts, they were staggering in the final stages of exhaustion.

Nor was there any respite at hand. In the near distance rose a towering column of dust in the breathless air, kicked up by hundreds of enraged Gora. The monsters stampeded along the trail to avenge the death of their kind and wipe out the intruders who threatened to upset their tight little economy.

As if the danger were not serious enough, the rear-guard leader injected another menace into the situation.

"Our heat ray guns, Miss Carlyle," he gasped. "They're running low. The beams are weak. Have any spares?"

A quick check-up showed that no one had any spares, and the guns of the main party were also found to be nearly exhausted. Strike shifted the burden of Kranz from one shoulder to the other.

"Well, Gerry, what do you do in that orange orchard of yours when the ants get as bad as this?" he asked.

"We put a patented device around the trunks of the trees, impregnated with something the ants can't cross over," Gerry said thoughtfully. "Sort of they-shall-not-pass strategy."

She paused, trembling on the verge of an idea. They were approaching a narrow defile between steep cliffs. On the farther side of this would be the open plain leading to the Ark. If they could somehow block that defile—

"Of course!" yelled Strike. "We'll give 'em a super-colossal hotfoot!"

Everyone stared at him as if he had

gone insane. But he herded the party quickly down the canyon, stopping just beyond the narrowest part.

"With the remaining energy in our guns, we couldn't begin to annihilate the Gora," he panted. "But we can lay down an impassable barrier. Look!"

He aimed a continuous blast at the rocky canyon bottom. The lavalike stuff smoked faintly, began to glow. Finally it bubbled and heaved like a mud geyser as it became molten. The effort completely emptied Strike's weapon. He cast it aside. But the others had caught on. Recklessly they poured their heat rays along the rough rock floor, from one side of the passage to the other. They made a complete band about five feet wide, extending from cliff to cliff, of seething lava. When their guns were useless, the party withdrew to a safe distance to watch.

The vanguard of the Gora raced into sight, pouring down the narrowing V-shaped gap toward the bubbling ribbon of doom. When they were almost upon the boiling magma, the leaders skidded to a halt, hissing shrilly. But those behind were unable to see any reason for stopping. They piled into the leaders with irresistible momentum. All of them sank waist-deep in the molten rock. Squealing hideously, they writhed in brief torture.

A cloud of steam quickly rose, mercifully hiding the slaughter. Louder and shriller came the shrieks of the dying Gora as hundreds, blinded by the steam and their own insensate fury, rushed headlong to an awful death.

STRIKE, first to find his voice, yelled above the noise.

"Better move on, gang. That stuff'll cool and some of 'em will get through."

Tearing themselves from the horribly fascinating scene, the hunters walked slowly away. They reached the *Ark* without further incident.

Their first action was to fling themselves down in the recreation room, seal themselves in tight, and literally bathe in blessed oxygen. Even Kranz, seriously though not fatally wounded, craved to saturate himself with oxygen even before going to the infirmary. Breathing easily was the most important immediate reward of their victory.

For two Titanian days and nights, rotating shifts of eager workers kept the shriek of welding and the clangor of hammers going almost without ceasing. At decreasing intervals, marauding bands of Gora came snooping around. But a blast of the proton cannon quickly discouraged their taste for this sort of entertainment. The last few hours of labor were without interruption of any kind.

Finally the centrifuge was repaired and new plates had been installed to make the engine rooms air-tight once more. As Gerry prepared to depart, she felt a curious mixture of relief and reluctance.

She had no fear that the Titanians would suffer because of human interference. The Gora were, indeed, too dependent upon the Titanians to avenge themselves upon their hosts. But there was so much to be learned, so many mysteries unsolved, so great a story yet untold! She wished they could remain and solve the mysteries. Perhaps they could even assist the likable Titanians to break loose from the invisible chains which bound them to their parasitic masters.

Instead, though, they had to leave at once. There was the matter of Kurtt, and Von Zorn, and their livelihood was in the balance. Yes, there was a score to be settled here, and the sooner the better. Maybe they could return some time. But now—

Ports clanged shut. The rotors began to whine in rising crescendo to a thin whistle that passed beyond the range of human ears. The *Ark* trembled, then rose in a breath-taking swoop. There were some doubtful moments among the engineers as they apprehensively watched the results of their welding. But no signs of strain developed. The patched centrifuge seemed as good as new.

"Full speed ahead!" came Gerry's command.

The *Ark* began to accelerate rapidly. Titan fell away, dropping to the size of a baseball, a marble, a pinpoint of light that was ultimately obscured. Saturn itself began to shrink, as if being squeezed by the encircling rings. The *Ark* began to approach a speed of thousands of miles per minute.

Still the relentless acceleration continued. There was no fuel supply to worry about. Gerry could call upon the almost infinite power of centrifugal force to drive them faster and ever faster through the vacuum of interplanetary space.

Gerry had no intention of coasting. Mechanical breakdown under the terrific drive was the only hazard. Carefully calculating the staying powers of her centrifuges under continual stress, she decided the risk was not too great, considering the prize at stake. So the speed was built up beyond anything ever achieved by ordinary rocket ships dependent upon atomic fuel. Jupiter loomed on the starboard, with its flock of scattered satellites, then quickly dropped behind.

CHAPTER XI

The Price of Victory

DAYS passed into weeks as the *Ark* continued her furious rush through space. The asteroid belt presented its hazardous barrier. But Gerry, disdaining to go cautiously above or below, plowed straight through.

It was a hectic stretch, with alarm bells ringing and the ship's lights dimming constantly as the repelling screen took the juice. But the *Ark* negotiated this cosmic blast and fled onward.

Finally the yellow-green speck that was Earth grew larger, easily visible as a disk to the naked eye. Worry began to seep through the crew as they neared the end of the journey. Despite their tremendous dash, they still had not seen any sign of Professor Erasmus Kurtt.

Had he already returned in triumph? If so, the belated appearance of the *Ark*, laggard and empty, would result in humiliation beyond endurance. Gerry's hot-headedly taunting speech had burned all her bridges. She would be the laughing-stock of the System. Strike voiced his doubt.

"Seems to me, Gerry, we should've caught up to Kurtt by now. Maybe he's already home. Or maybe he cracked up somewhere. Maybe we ought to've

picked up another dermaphos on Saturn before leaving. Maybe—"

"Maybe you think Kurtt will win this race. I admit he must have pushed along pretty fast to have kept ahead of us this far. You can take my word for it, Tommy. We'll find him utterly helpless, probably revolving around the Moon as a satellite."

Strike gaped stupidly at this calm statement of authority. But his astonishment was nothing compared with the emotions he felt when they came within telescope range of the Moon. They began decelerating with body-wracking speed. They had seen Professor Kurtt's space ship! Its glassed-in section was unmistakable. The ship was spinning futilely about the Moon in a eccentric orbit, elongated by the strong pull of Earth.

Strike turned toward his fiancée, demanding fiercely:

"All right, all right! Never mind the laughs. Explain this, will you? How did you know? What's happened to Kurtt?"

Gerry controlled her delight long enough to elucidate.

"It's so simple, Tommy. It all hinges on one of the first principles of our craft—study your specimens. Kurtt didn't. He let us do all the work, then simply helped himself to a monster he knew nothing about. One thing he didn't know was that the dermaphos needs uranium for its metabolism. He stored away a haphazard mess of vegetation for it to feed on, as we could see when he stole our dermaphos. But only a small percentage was that cabbage-shaped thing with the uranium salts deposits.

"Then he put our dermaphos in the glass showcase of his, where it was exposed to the full sunlight for many days. What happened? Well, the metabolism of the creature, accustomed to a minimum of sunshine, was stepped up tremendously. He became ravenous. He ate up all the vegetation and probably all the other Saturnian specimens in the hold. But a dermaphos can't utilize this food without the catalytic assistance of uranium salts.

"He sensed the presence, probably by its radiation, of the Uranium Two-thirty-five in the nearby fuel hoppers.

I know the construction of the type of ship Kurtt uses. Between the hold and the fuel hoppers, there's only a light door. The dermaphos, growing more active under stimulus of the sunshine, can easily smash it. It doesn't take much Two-thirty-five to operate a rocket ship, so the dermaphos finished it off in a few mouthfuls.

"Kurtt is left with just the fuel remaining in the firing chambers and feeder tubes, not enough to decelerate for a landing on Earth. The best he can possibly do is fall into a braking orbit around the Moon, ultimately swinging around it as a satellite."

STRIKE stared at Gerry in exasperation, resenting her omniscience. Yet she was apparently correct. If so, it was certainly a huge joke. He began to chuckle. "So that's why you laughed when he took our dermaphos! Well, I hope you're right, smartie."

There was excitement when the *Ark* finally drifted past the Moon toward Kurtt's helpless ship. Several private yachts and little sputtering spaceabouts were circling around like crows after a hawk. The space taxis traveling from Hollywood on the Moon to the big bloated gambling ships detoured so their passengers could get a look at the phenomenon.

They all scattered wildly as the mighty *Ark* eased into position beside Kurtt's rocket.

"Kurtt will be having conniptions about now," Gerry said. "He can't win the race unless he returns under his own power, and he can't do that unless he has someone bring him extra fuel. That, of course, would be contrary to the terms of the contest."

Deftly she maneuvered alongside the glassed-in hold. It was empty of life, animal or vegetable. She had been right about the appetite of the dermaphos. Presently Professor Kurtt himself appeared at one of the forward portholes. He stared at the *Ark* like a murderer who looks upon the ghost of his victim. Stark terror bulged his eyeballs. Gerry motioned vigorously for him to go to the ravaged hold and arrange for the crew of the *Ark* to make contact there.

Kurtt refused in pantomime. Gerry casually pushed the button which auto-

matically slid the proton cannon from the concealed ports. In full view, they pointed directly at the hull of Kurtt's ship. Kurtt grudgingly obeyed. He appeared in a pressure suit and assisted his men in joining the two ships by the contact tube. Gerry led her crew into Kurtt's ship. Fully dressed in pressure suits, they entirely ignored the ugly looks and mutterings from Kurtt's men. She found her dermaphos in the fuel compartment.

Promptly she gas-bombed it into a coma, strapped the gravity plates around it, and transferred it to the *Ark*. The pressure there had once again been built up to resemble Saturnian conditions.

Then she peremptorily ordered Professor Erasmus Kurtt to come at once to the control room of the *Ark*. Kurtt came reluctantly, shucking off his pressure suit at Gerry's command. The girl and Strike stood staring at him balefully in silence. Kurtt grew visibly more nervous by the moment.

"You're taller than I am," Tommy said at last. "Almost as heavy. It'll be a fairly even match."

Kurtt gulped and whined a feeble protest. Gerry cut him short.

"Just a question or two, Professor. You have any objections to our reclaiming our dermaphos? Laws of salvage, you know."

Her voice was bitter-sweet, but Kurtt shook his head in mute fright.

"Do these jackals"—she waved at the bunch of curiosity-seekers hovering about—"know anything what happened? Could they have seen the dermaphos? Have you communicated with anyone since you ran out of fuel?"

"N-no. No one knows anything. I was t-trying to f-figure out a way to get t-to Earth."

The girl smiled in complacent satisfaction.

"That fortunate circumstance may save you a lot of grief. We might not even have to air this matter in a court of law. And now, Tommy? I think the rest of this case is in your department."

TOMMY escorted Kurtt into another room and closed the door. Faintly his words came through the door.

"You deliberately wrecked our ship in mid-space, stole the fruits of our labor, and calmly left us to die. Don't get the idea that we don't like you, Kurtt. We just think you're a louse. This'll hurt you more than it hurts me—"

There was the sound of a hard fist striking bone. Then there was tumult. Gerry cocked an ear critically and turned to the visiphone to put in a call to Hollywood on the Moon. Von Zorn was not there, but the call was transferred to the California offices. Presently the simian features of the great Von Zorn—the little Napoleon of the film industry—glowered from the telescreen.

"So it's you!" he snapped, staring at her under lowered brows. "From the reports I been getting of such excitement at the Moon, I should've guessed as much."

"Don't you want to know what happened?" asked Gerry with suspicious sweetness.

"All right. So what goes on? Where's that dog, Kurtt?"

Carefully sparing no single detail, Gerry told the story of Kurtt's dastardly trick. Throughout the recital, Von Zorn's face turned crimson, then pasty white, then a peculiar shade of puce.

"Lord!" he groaned, fully realizing what it might mean to him if the murderous behavior of his candidate became known to the public. "I—I—So help me, I didn't authorize him to do any such thing as that. With me, it was supposed to be just a race, on the square. Honest!"

Gerry sadistically enjoyed the spectacle of Von Zorn squirming and perspiring. Then she said regretfully:

"Yes, I know it was just Kurtt's idea."

The relief on the man's face was comical.

"Well, then," he barked, "I give up Kurtt. Of him I wash my hands. Absolutely—"

"Ah, ah. Not so fast. I know you don't play dirty, but does the world know it?"

Von Zorn's complexion was in a constant state of flux. Now it became pale again.

"But—but you wouldn't break that story when it would ruin me unjustly!

Come, now. I know you better than that. You're too much of a lady!"

"I am not. And only one thing will prevent me from telling the whole story. I'll let you have an armistice on my terms."

"Why—why that's blackmail!"

"It is, isn't it?" she agreed pleasantly.

"Are you going to pay?"

"Okay," Von Zorn groaned. "So what's the price?"

"A huge banquet in my honor tomorrow night. Tommy, the crew and I are to be guests of honor. You will be the host."

Von Zorn buried his face in his hands at the thought of this humiliation.

"There must be flowers, motion picture celebrities, and newscasters," Gerry continued remorselessly. "The speech of the evening will be made by you, eating humble-pie. You will stress the fact that not only have I brought home the dermaphos, but also your entry in the competition. I am bringing back Erasmus Kurtt—"

She turned as the door opened and Tommy Strike entered. He was slightly bruised. Behind him he dragged a shapeless bundle, which he laid at Gerry's feet with the proud expression of a cat bringing something for its young. She examined the repulsive thing briefly.

"Yes." Gerry turned back to the telescreen. "We're bringing Kurtt back alive."

Von Zorn moaned in protest.

"I can't do it. It ain't human. It's cruel."

Gerry was adamant.

"Yes or no? After all, I'm letting you down plenty easy."

Von Zorn braced himself visibly.

"All right. This once maybe I can do it. But if it kills me from shame, I'd hate to live with your conscience."

GERRY CARLYLE and Von Zorn traded long, silent looks over thousands of miles of space, via the visiphone. Slowly Gerry smiled.

"You're a pretty good loser, at that," she said.

Von Zorn grimaced, remembering what Gerry could have done to him if she had been at all vindictive.

"And you're not such a bad winner.

But this is only one round. I ain't lost yet. Next time, maybe, huh?"

Gerry smiled with scornful superiority.

"Just keep on swinging, little man. Some day you'll learn you're fighting out of your class. Well, see you tomorrow night." She snapped the screen to darkness and turned to Strike. "And that is that."

"Not quite," contradicted Strike.

"Have you forgotten the proper fade-out to every melodrama, after the forces of evil have been defeated and the villain properly thrashed?"

Gerry smiled tantalizingly. Tommy shoved the battered Kurtt aside with one foot and seized his fiancée. There was a struggle, but it was quite brief. It ended in a well known gesture of mutual affection between the male and the female of the human species.

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THE afternoon Rocket Express train from Chicago came into the station, and I stepped off. It was a warm spring day. The little town of Elkhart, Indiana, sprawled lazily under the golden sunshine. I trudged along quiet, tree-shaded streets toward Caslon Preparatory School for Boys.

Before I had gone far, I was discovered by the children playing here and there. With the dogs, they formed a shrill, raucous procession behind me. Some of the dogs growled, as they might at a wild animal. Housewives looked from their windows and gasped.

So the rumors they had heard were true. The new teacher at Caslon was a Martian!

I suppose I am grotesquely alien to human eyes, extremely tall and incredibly thin. In fact, I am seven feet tall, with what have often been described as broomstick arms and spindly legs. On an otherwise scrawny body, only the Martian chest is filled out, in comparison with Earth people. I was dressed in a cotton kimona that dangled from my narrow shoulders to my bony ankles. Chinese style, I understand.

Thus far I am pseudo-human. For the rest, a Martian is alien, from the Earth viewpoint. Two long tentacles from the back of my shoulders hang to my knees, appendages that have not vanished in Martian evolution like the human tail. The top of my skull is bulging and hairless, except for a fringe

of silver-white fur above large conch-shaped ears. Two wide-set owlsh eyes, a generous nose and a tiny mouth complete my features. All my skin is leathery and tanned a deep mahogany by the Sun of our cloudless Martian skies.

Timidly I stopped before the gates of Caslon Prep and looked within the grounds. The spectacles on my large nose were cup-shaped and of tinted glass that cut down the unnatural glare of the brighter, hotter Sun. I felt my shoulders drooping wearily from the tug of more than twice the gravity to which I was conditioned.

Luckily, however, I had brought leg-braces. Concealed by my long robe, they were ingenious devices of light metal, bracing the legs against strain. They had been expensive—no less than forty *dhupecs*—but they were worth even that much.

Gripping my cane and duffle-bag, I prepared to step into the sanctuary of the school grounds. It looked so green and inviting in there, like a canalside park. It would be a relief to escape from those Earth children. They had taken to tossing pebbles at me, and some of the canines had snapped at my heels. Of course I didn't blame them, nor must I resent the unwelcome stares I had felt all around me, from adult Earthlings. After all, I was an alien.

I STEPPED forward, between the gates. At least here, in the school that had hired me to teach, I would be accepted in a more friendly fashion. . . .
Ssss!

The hiss of a thousand snakes filled



the air. I reacted violently, dropping my bag and clamping my two hands around my upraised cane. For a moment I was back on Mars, surrounded by a nest of killer-snakes from the vast deserts. I must beat them off with my cane!

But wait. This was Earth, where snakes were a minor class of creature, and mainly harmless. I relaxed, then, panting. The horrible, icy fear drained

away. Perhaps you human beings can never quite know the paralyzing dread we have of snakes.

Then I heard a new sound, one that cheered me somewhat.

A group of about fifty laughing boys trooped into view, from where they had been hidden behind the stone wall circling Caslon's campus. They had made the hissing sound, as a boyish prank. How foolish of me to let go of

my nerves, I thought wryly.

I smiled at the group in greeting, for these were the boys I would teach.

"I am Professor Mun Zeerohs, your new teacher," I introduced myself in what, compared with the human tone, is a reedy voice. "The Sun shine upon you. Or, in your Earthly greeting, I am happy to meet you."

Grins answered me. And then murmurs arose.

"It talks, fellows."

"Up from the canals!"

"Is that thing alive?"

One of the boys stepped forward. He was about sixteen, with blue eyes that were mocking.

"I'm Tom Blaine, senior classman. Tell me, sir, is it true that Mars is inhabited?"

It was rather a cruel reception, though merely another prank. I waved my two tentacles in distress for a moment, hardly knowing what to do or say next.

"Boys! Gentlemen!"

A grown man with gray hair came hurrying up from one of the buildings. The boys parted to let him through. He extended a hand to me, introducing himself.

"Robert Graham, Dean of Caslon. You're Professor Mun Zeerohs, of course." He turned, facing the group reprovingly. "This is your new instructor, gentlemen. He will teach interplanetary history and the Martian language."

A groan went up. I knew why, of course. The Martian tongue has two case endings to every one in Latin.

"Now, gentlemen, this is for your own good," Dean Graham continued sternly. "Remember your manners. I'm sure you'll like our new professor—"

"I'm sure we won't!" It was Tom Blaine again. Behind him, an air of hostility replaced the less worrisome mockery. "We've never had a Martian teacher before, and we don't want one!"

"Don't want one?" The dean was more aghast than I.

"My father says Martians are cowards," Tom Blaine continued loudly. "He ought to know. He's in the Space Patrol. He says that in the War, the Martians captured Earthmen and cut them to pieces slowly. First

their hands, then—"

"Nonsense!" Dean Graham snapped. "Besides, the War is over. Martians are in the Space Patrol, too. Now no more argument. Go to your dormitory. Professor Zeerohs will begin conducting class tomorrow morning. Oscar, take the professor's bag to his quarters."

OSCAR, the school's menial robot, obediently stalked forward and picked up the bag. Somehow, I felt almost a warm tide of friendship for the robot. In his mechanical, rudimentary reflex mind, it was all the same to him—Martian or Earthman. He made no discrimination against me, as these human boys did.

As Oscar turned, Tom Blaine stood as though to block the way. Having his orders, the robot brushed past him. A metal elbow accidentally jabbed the boy in the ribs. Deciding against grabbing the bag away from steel fingers, Tom Blaine picked up a stone and flung it clanging against the robot's metal body. Another dent was added to the many I could see over Oscar's shiny form.

The rebellion was over—for the time being.

I realized that the boys were still hostile as I followed the dean to his rooms. My shoulders seemed to droop a little more.

"Don't mind them," the dean was saying apologetically. "They're usually outspoken at that age. They've never had a Martian teacher before, you see."

"Why have you engaged one for the first time?" I asked.

Graham answered half patronizingly, half respectfully.

"Many other schools have tried Martian teachers, and found them highly satisfactory." He didn't think it necessary to add, "And cheaper."

I sighed. Times had been hard on Mars lately, with so many dust storms raging up and down the canal regions, withering the crops. This post on Earth, though at a meager salary, was better than utter poverty. I was old and could live cheaply. Quite a few Martians had been drifting to Earth, since the War. By nature, we are docile, industrious, intelligent, and make de-

pendable teachers, engineers, chemists, artists.

"They always haze the new teachers," Dean Graham said, smiling uneasily. "Your first class is at nine o'clock tomorrow morning. Interplanetary History."

Freshened after a night's sleep, I entered the class room with enthusiasm for my new job. A hundred cold, unfriendly eyes watched me with terrifying intensity.

"Good morning," I greeted as warmly as I could.

"Good morning, Professor Zero!" a chorus bellowed back, startling me.

So the hazing campaign was still on. No, I wouldn't correct them. After all, even the Martian children I had taught had invariably tagged me with that name.

I glanced around the room, approving its high windows and controlled sunlight. My eyes came to rest on the blackboard behind me. A chalk drawing occupied its space. It depicted, with some skill, a Martian crouching behind an Earthman. Both were members of the Space Patrol and apparently were battling some space desperado. It was young Tom Blaine's work, no doubt. His father claimed all Martians to be cowards and weaklings.

MY leathery face showed little of my feelings as I erased the humiliating sketch. Ignoring the snickers behind me, I grasped two pieces of chalk in both tentacles, writing with one and listing dates with the other.

1945—Discovery of anti-grav force, on Earth

1955—First space flight

1978—Earthmen claim all planets

1992—Pioneer-wave to Mars

2011—Rebellion and war

2019—Mars wins freedom

2040—Earth-Mars relations friendly today

"Interplanetary History," I began my lecture, "centers about these dates and events. Not till Nineteen fifty-five were Earth people assured that intelligent beings had built the mysterious canals of Mars. Nor were we Martians positive till then that the so-called Winking Lights of your cities at night denoted the handiwork of thinking creatures.

The exploring Earthmen of the last century found only the Martians equal to them in intelligence. Earth has its great cities, and Mars has its great canal-system, built ten thousand Martian years ago. Civilization began on Mars fifty centuries previous to that, before the first glimmering of it on Earth—"

"See, fellows?" Tom Blaine interrupted loudly. "I told you all they like to do is rub that in." He became mockingly polite. "Please, sir, may I ask why you brilliant Martians had to wait for Earthmen to open up space travel?"

I was shocked, but managed to answer patiently.

"We ran out of metal deposits for building, keeping our canals in repair. Our history has been a constant struggle against the danger of extinction. In fact, when Earth pioneers migrated in Nineteen ninety-two, it was just in time to patch up the canals and stave off a tremendous famine for Mars."

"And that was the appreciation Earth got," the boy charged bitterly. "Rebellion!"

"You forget that the Earth pioneers on Mars started the rebellion against taxation, and fought side by side with us—"

"They were traitors," he stated bluntly.

I hurdled the point, and continued the lecture.

"Mars won its independence after a nine-year struggle—"

Again I was interrupted.

"Not won. Earth *granted* independence, though it could have won easily."

"At any rate," I resumed quietly, "Earth and Mars today, in Twenty-fourty, are amicable, and have forgotten that episode."

"We haven't forgotten!" Tom Blaine cried angrily. "Every true Earthman despises Martians."

He sat down amidst a murmur of defiant approval from the others. I knew my tentacles hung limply. How aggressive and intolerant Earth people were! It accounted for their domination of the Solar System. A vigorous, pushing race, they sneered at the Martian ideals of peaceful culture. Their

pirates, legal and otherwise, still roamed the spaceways for loot.

YOUNG Tom Blaine was representative of the race. He was determined to make things so miserable here for me that I would quit. He was the leader of the upper-class boys. Strange, that Earthpeople always follow one who is not wise, but merely compelling. There would have to be a test of authority, I told myself with a sinking heart.

"I am the teacher," I reminded him. "You are the pupil, Mr. Blaine."

"Oh, yes, sir," he retorted in false humility. "But you'd better teach history right, Professor Nothing, or not at all!"

I hastily switched to the Martian language.

"The Martian language as is well known, is today the official language of science and trade," I went on guardedly. "Through long usage, the tongue has become perfected. Official Earth English is comparatively cumbersome. For instance, the series of words meaning exaggerated size—big, large, great, huge, enormous, mighty, cyclopean, gargantuan. Is 'big' more than 'large', or less? You cannot tell. In Martian, there is one root, with a definite progression of size suffixes."

I wrote on the blackboard.

bol, bola, boli, bolo, bolu—bolas, bolis, bolos, bolus—bolasa, bolisi, boloso, bolusu

"Martian is a scientific language, you see."

"Bragging again," sneered a voice.

An eraser sailed toward me just as I turned from the board. It struck full in my face in a cloud of chalk-dust. As if at a signal, a barrage of erasers flew at me. They had been sneaked previously from the boards around the classroom. I stood helplessly, desperately warding off the missile with my tentacles. The boys were yelling and hooting, excited by the sport.

The pandemonium abruptly stopped as Oscar stumped into the room. His mechanical eyes took in the scene without emotion. One belated eraser flew toward him. His steel arm reflexively

raised, caught it, then hurled it back with stunning force. To a robot, anything that came toward it must be returned, unless otherwise commanded. Tom Blaine yelped as the eraser bounced off his forehead.

"Dean Graham," said Oscar like a phonograph, "wants to know if everything is going along smoothly."

I could see the boys hold their breaths. Oscar went the rounds daily, asking that routine question in all the classes. If this disturbance were reported, the boys would lose an afternoon of freedom.

"Everything is well," I murmured, though for a moment I was sadly tempted to take revenge. "You may go, Oscar."

With a click of internal relays, the robot left impassively. He had seen or heard nothing, without being otherwise commanded.

"Afraid to report it, eh?" Tom Blaine jeered. "I told you Martians are yellow!"

It was more than gravity now that made my shoulders sag. I dreaded the days that must follow.

EVEN outside the classroom, I was hounded. I can use only that word. Tom Blaine thought of the diabolical trick of deliberately spilling a glass of water before my eyes.

"Don't — don't!" I instinctively groaned, clutching at the glass.

"What's the matter, Professor?" he asked blandly. "This is nothing but water."

"It's sacrilege—"

I stopped there. They wouldn't understand. How horrible to see water spill to the ground in utter waste! For ten thousand years, on Mars, that precious fluid has been the object of our greatest ingenuity. It hurt to see it wantonly flung away, as they might flinch if blood were shed uselessly before them.

As I stumbled away from their laughter, I heard Tom Blaine confide to his cohorts:

"I got the idea last night, looking in his room. He was playing with a bowl of water. Running it through his fingers, like a miser. I've got another idea,

fellows. Follow me to the kitchen."

I wasn't aware till half through the solitary evening meal in my rooms that the food tasted odd. It was salty! The boys had stolen into the kitchen and salted my special saltless foods. My stomach revolted against the alien condiment. Mars' seas, from which our life originated long ago, held no sodium chloride, only magnesium chloride, with which all Martian food is "salted."

I went to bed, groaning with a severe headache and upset stomach from an outraged metabolism. Worse, it rained that night. I tried to shut my ears to that pattering sound. Millions of gallons of water were going to waste, while millions of Martians on my home world, were painfully hoarding water for their thirsty crops.

The pains eased before morning. What torment would Tom Blaine and his relentless pack think of next? The answer came when I found my spectacles missing. My eyes were almost blinded that day, more from glare than senile failing of vision. They watered and blinked in light that was fifty per cent stronger than on more remote Mars.

"Lower the blinds, Oscar," I ordered the robot when he appeared as usual.

"But, Professor," Tom Blaine protested, jumping up as though waiting for the moment, "think of our eyes. We can't read our lessons in the dark."

"Never mind, Oscar," I said wearily.

The robot stood for a moment, relays clashing at the reversed orders. When he finally left, he seemed to shrug at the strange doings of his masters, Earthmen and Martians alike.

"Have you any idea where my glasses are, Mr. Blaine?" I asked in direct appeal. I tried not to sound timid.

"No, of course not," he retorted virtuously.

I nodded to myself and reached for the lower left-hand drawer of my desk, then changed my mind.

"Will you all help me look for them?" I pleaded.

THEY ransacked the desk with deliberate brutality.

"Why, here they are, Professor!"

Tom held them up from the lower

left-hand drawer in mock triumph. I put them on with trembling hands.

"How careless of me to leave them here yesterday." I smiled. "One must have a sense of humor about these things. Now we will decline the verb *krun*, to move."

I went on as though nothing had happened, but my whole head ached from hours of straining my eyes against the cruel glare.

That night, utterly exhausted, I went to bed only to find my anti-gravity unit jammed, obviously by human hands. One of my few pleasures was the ability to sink into restful slumber in the low-gravity field, after suffering the tug of Earth gravity at my vitals all day. Earthmen on Jupiter know how agonizing it becomes.

I passed a sleepless night, panting and aching under what grew to be the pressure of a mountain. How could I go on against such heartlessness? Tom Blaine and his friends were ruthlessly determined to drive out their depised Martian teacher. If I complained to Dean Graham, it would be an admission of cowardice. I didn't want to betray my race. But I was miserably aware that I had not a single friend in the academy.

Oscar appeared in the morning, with a message from Dean Graham. The mechanical servant waited patiently to be told to go. When I swayed a little, he caught me. His reflexes had been patterned not to let things fall.

"Thank you, Oscar." I found my hand on the robot's shiny hard shoulder. It was comfortingly firm. "You're my only friend, Oscar. At least, you're not my enemy. But what am I saying? You're only a machine. You may go, Oscar."

The message read:

Today and tomorrow are examination days. Use the enclosed forms. At three o'clock today, all classes will be excused to the Television Auditorium.

The examinations were routine. Despite my unrested body and mind, I felt an uplift of spirit. My class would do well. I had managed, even against hostility, to impart a sound understanding of Interplanetary History and the

Martian language.

I looked almost proudly over the bowed, laboring heads. Suddenly I stiffened.

"Mr. Henderson," I said gently, "I wouldn't try that if I were you."

The boy flushed, hastily crammed into his pockets the notes he had been copying from. Then he gaped up in amazement. Tom Blaine, at the desk beside him, also looked up startled. The question was plain in his eyes. How could I know that Henderson was cheating, when even Tom, sitting next to him hadn't suspected?

"You forget," I explained hesitantly, "that Martians use telepathy at will."

Tom Blaine stared, his mouth hanging open. Then he jumped up.

"Are we going to stand for that? Spying on us, even in our minds—" He gasped at a sudden thought. "You knew all the time about the glasses. You didn't expose me." He flushed, but in anger rather than embarrassment. "You made a fool of me!"

"One must have a sense of humor about those things," I said lamely.

The rest of the examination period passed in bristling silence. More than ever, now, they were hostile to me. More than ever would they show their antagonism. How could I ever hope to win them, if patience was taken for cowardice, understanding for malice, and telepathy for deliberate spying?

Why had I ever left Mars, to come to this alien, heart-breaking world?

AT three o'clock, examinations were over for that day. The class filed to the Television Auditorium.

A giant screen in the darkened room displayed a drama on Venus, then news-flashes from around the system. An asteroid, scene of the latest radium rush. Ganymede, with its talking plant show. Titan's periodic meteor shower from the rings of Saturn. A cold, dark scene on Pluto, where a great telescope was being built for interstellar observations. Finally Mars, and a file of Earthmen and Martians climbing into a sleek Space Patrol ship.

"The Patrol ship *Greyhound*," inform the announcer, "is being dispatched after pirates. Captain Henry

Blaine is determined to blast them, or not come back."

"My father," Tom Blaine said proudly to his classmates.

"My son," I murmured, leaning forward to watch the last of the Martians vanish within.

When the armed ship leaped into space, the television broadcast was over.

There were no more classes that day. I dragged across the campus toward the haven of my rooms, for I needed rest and quiet.

A shriek tore from my throat the instant I saw it. A horrible, wriggling snake lay in my path! It was only a small, harmless garden snake, my reason told me. But a million years of instinct yelled danger, death! I stumbled and fell, trying to run against gravity that froze my muscles. I shrank from the squirming horror as it stopped and defiantly darted out its forked tongue.

The outside world burst into my conscienceness with a thunderclap of laughter. Tom Blaine was holding up the wriggling snake. Once the first shock was over, I managed to keep my nerves in check.

"It's only a garter snake," he mocked. "Sorry it frightened you."

But what would they say if a hungry, clawing tiger suddenly appeared before them? How would they feel? I left without a word, painfully compelling my trembling limbs to move.

I was beaten. That thought hammered within my skull.

They had broken my spirit. I came to that conclusion after staring up at a red star that winked soberly and seemed to nod in pity. There was my true home. I longed to go back to its canals and deserts. Harsh they might be, but not so harsh as the unfeeling inhabitants of this incredibly rich planet.

I went to my rooms and started to pack.

Angry voices swiftly approached my door. The boys burst in, led by Tom Blaine.

"Murderer!" Tom yelled. "A man was strangled in town two hours ago, by a rope—or a tentacle! You looked murder at us this afternoon. Why did

you kill him? Just general hate for the human race?"

How fantastic it sounded, yet they weren't mere boys, now. They were a blood-lusting mob. All their hate and misunderstanding for me had come to a head. I knew it was no use even to remonstrate.

"Look, fellows! He was packing up to sneak away. He's the killer, all right. Are you going to confess, Professor Zeerohs, or do we have to make you confess!"

It was useless to resist their burly savagery and strong Earth muscles. They held me and ripped away the light metal braces supporting my legs. Then I was forced outside and prodded along. They made me walk up and down, back of the dormitory, in the light of sub-atomic torches.

IT became sheer torture within an hour. Without the braces, my weak muscles sagged under my weight. Earth's gravity more than doubled the normal strain.

"Confess!" Tom snapped fiercely. "Then we'll take you to the police."

I shook my head, as I had each time Tom demanded my confession. My one hopeless comfort was the prayer of an earthly prophet, who begged the First Cause to forgive his children, for they knew not what they did.

For another hour, the terrible march kept up. I became a single mass of aching flesh. My bones seemed to be cracking and crumbling under the weight of the Universe. My mental anguish was still sharper, for the tide of hate beat against me like a surf.

Where was Dean Graham? Then I remembered that he had gone to visit his relatives that evening. There was no one to help me, no one to stop these half-grown men who saw their chance to get rid of me. Only the winking red eye of Mars looked down in compassion for the suffering of a humble son.

"Oscar's coming!" warned a voice.

Ponderously the robot approached, the night-light in his forehead shining. He made the rounds every night, like a mechanical watchman. As he eyed the halted procession, his patterned reflexes were obviously striving to figure

out what its meaning could be.

"Boys will go to the dormitory," his microphonic voice boomed. "Against regulations to be out after ten o'clock."

"Oscar, you may go," barked Tom Blaine.

The robot didn't budge. His selectors were set to obey only the voices of teachers and officials.

"Oscar—" I began with a wild cry.

A boy clamped his hand over my mouth. The last of my strength oozed from me, and I slumped to the ground. Though I was not unconscious, I knew my will would soon be insufficient to make me resist. The boys looked frightened.

"Maybe we've gone too far," one said nervously.

"He deserves it," shrilled Tom uneasily. "He's a cowardly murderer!"

"Tom!" Pete Miller came running up, from the direction of the town. "Just heard the news—the police caught the killer—a maniac with a rope." He recoiled in alarm when he saw my sprawled form. "What did you do, fellows? He's innocent, and he really isn't such a bad old guy."

The boys glanced at one another with guilty eyes. Fervently I blessed young Miller for that statement.

"Don't be sentimental," Tom Blaine said much too loudly. "Martians are cowards. My father says so. I'm glad we did this, anyway. It'll drive him away for sure. We'd better beat it now."

The group melted away, leaving me on the ground. Oscar stalked forward and picked me up. Any fallen person must be helped up, according to his patterned mind. But his steel arms felt softer than Tom Blaine's heartless accusation.

THE class gasped almost in chorus the next morning, when their Martian professor entered quietly, as though nothing had happened the night before.

"Examinations will continue," I announced.

It was small wonder that they looked surprised. First, that I had appeared at all, weak and spent by the night's cruel ordeal. Second, that I had not

given up and left. Third, that I hadn't reported the episode to Dean Graham. The punishment would have been severe.

Only I knew I was back because it would be cowardly to leave. Mentally and physically I was sick, but not beaten. Besides, I had heard young Miller insist that I was not such a bad old guy, after all. It was like a well of cool water in a hot desert.

Examinations began. Oscar entered, handed me a spacegram and clanked out again. Nervously I opened and read the message. My tentacles twitched uncontrollably at the ends, then curled around the chair arms and clung desperately. Everything vanished before my eyes except the hideous, shocking words of the spacegram.

My world was ended. Mars or Earth—it made no difference. I could not go on. But existence must continue. I could not let this break me. Grimly I folded the paper and laid it aside.

I looked with misted eyes at their lowered heads. I needed a friend as never before, but hostility and hatred were the only emotions they felt for me as I tuned to them one by one. They hated their teacher, though they knew him to be wise, humble, patient, as Martians are by nature.

And I was beginning to hate them. They were forcing me to. Savagely I hoped they would all fail in their examinations.

I switched back to young Miller, who was biting his pencil. Forehead beaded with sweat, he was having a difficult time. Thoughts were racing through his brain.

Wanted so much to pass . . . enter Space Point . . . join the Space Patrol some day . . . Not enough time to study . . . job in spare time after school hours . . . help parents . . . In what year did the first explorer step on Neptune's moon? Why, Nineteen-seventy-six! Funny how that came all of a sudden . . . Now what was the root for "planet," in Martian? Why, *jad*, of course! It isn't so hard after all . . .

Wish that old Martian wouldn't stare at me as if he's reading my mind . . . How many moons has Jupiter? Always get it mixed up with Saturn.

Eighteen, six found by space ships! Funny, I'm so sure of myself . . . I'll lick this exam yet . . . Dad's going to be proud of me when I'm wearing that uniform. . . .

I turned my eyes away from Miller's happy face. A deserving boy, he would be a credit to the Space Patrol. Others had their troubles, not just I.

Abruptly there was an interruption. Oscar came clanking in hurriedly.

"Dean Graham wishes all classes to file out on the campus, for a special event," he boomed.

The boys whispered in curiosity and left the classroom at my unsteady order. The campus was filled with the entire school faculty and enrollment. My group of senior classmen was allowed to stand directly in front of the bandstand. I felt weak and in need of support, but there was no one to give it to me.

DEAN GRAHAM raised a hand. "A member of the Space Patrol is here," he spoke, "having come from Space Point by rocket-strato for an important announcement. Major Dawson."

A tall, uniformed man, wearing the blue of the Space Patrol, stepped forward, acknowledging the assembly's unrestrained cheer with a solemn nod. The Patrol is honored throughout the System for its gallant service to civilization.

"Many of you boys," he said, "hope to enter Space Point some day, and join the Service. This bulletin, received an hour ago, will do honor to someone here."

He held up the paper and read aloud. "Captain Henry Blaine, in command of Patrol ship *Greyhound*, yesterday was wounded in the daring rout of pirates off the Earth-Mars run."

All eyes turned to Tom Blaine, who was proud of the ceremony in honor of his father. The official held up a radium-coated medal—the Cross of Space, for extraordinary service to the forces of law and order in the Solar System. Dean Graham whispered in his ear. He nodded, stepping down from the rostrum and advancing.

My gasp of surprise was deeper than

those of the others as he brushed past Tom Blaine. Stopping before me, he pinned the glowing medal on my chest. Then he grasped my hand.

"I think you'll be proud to wear that all your life!" He turned, reading further from his bulletin. "Captain Blaine's life was saved by a youthful Martian recruit, who leaped in front of him and took the full blast that wounded the Earthman. His name was—"

I found myself watching Tom Blaine. He didn't have to hear the name. He was staring at the spacegram he had stolen from my desk, but hadn't had a chance to read till now. He had sensed my momentary agitation over it, and had hoped perhaps to use it against me. It read:

WE DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU OF THE DEATH OF YOUR SON, KOL ZEEROHS, IN HEROIC SERVICE FOR THE SPACE PATROL.

—THE HIGH COMMAND,
SPACE PATROL.

BUT now my weakness overwhelmed me. I was aware only of someone at my side, supporting me, as my knees threatened to buckle. It must have been Oscar.

No—it was a human being!

"Every one of us here," Tom Blaine said, tightening his grip around me, "is your son now—if that will help a little. You're staying of course, Professor. You couldn't leave now if you tried."

We smiled at each other, and my thin hand was nearly crushed in his young, strong grasp. Yes, the teacher from Mars would stay.



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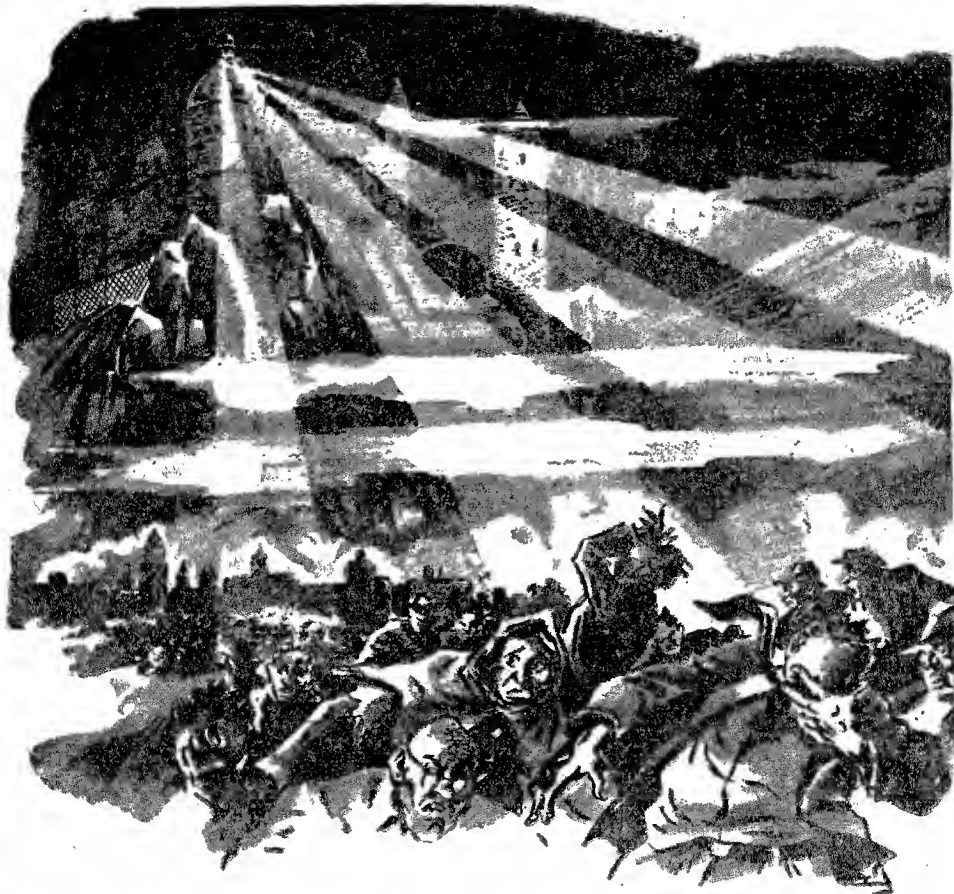
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**The Greatest City in the World Bows Before a Biological Barrage
as Invisible Doom Cloaks Humanity in a Mantle of Madness!**

CHAPTER I

Mystery Blight

THERE was a crash in Ward C and an answering scream. Then followed a series of violent concussions, quick shouts, the sound of people staggering across the floor. The in a hospital gown dashed out, followed by disheveled orderlies.

The fugitive patient raced down the corridor, bowling over the amazed desk nurse in his path. He paused long enough to wrench a fire-extinguisher from the wall, spin about and hurtle it

in the faces of his pursuers. Then, using his bare fists, he smashed out the heavy panes of a window and dived through to the ground—and freedom—a floor below.

Phones jangled wildly, call bells rang, and emergency lights blinked. Nurses leaped to their stations and interns poured out of the staff house, struggling into their jackets. At the great iron gates that bordered the hospital's grounds, guards looked about nervously, wondered what in blazes was going on. Near Emergency, across the way from the ambulance garages, someone shouted once and then, a few

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seconds later, again, this time feebly. The hunting interns veered sharply in their tracks and caught sight of a tall slender figure flitting through the shrubbery. It was the escaping patient.

An intern dashed out of Admissions and plunged into the brush. In another instant the crowd saw him spin around between the hot-houses a few yards behind the fleeing patient. As they broke into the clear, he left his feet in a flying tackle that brought both sliding to a halt along the gritty soil. Then the others came up and seized the furiously struggling patient. It needed four pow-

erful orderlies to drag him off to Psychiatric.

The intern brushed himself off, shook his head once, and limped painfully until he reached the Administration Offices. He pushed through, kicked open the inner door and seated himself with a sigh. The big man in tweeds at the important-looking desk looked up in astonishment and threw down his pen.

"Now then, Lewis," he said, "what the—"

"Doctor Cole to you," grinned the intern. He squirmed around in the leather chair and smiled amiably. "Oh worshipful Director, I am bearer of

evil tidings. On second thought, Mr. Miller, I think you'd better call me Hero Cole."

"What's on your mind?" Miller snapped irritably. "I'm a busy man, Cole."

"Not too busy for what I have to say."

MILLER looked up shrewdly at the young intern.

"I know what you're going to say."

"So you've guessed it already, eh?" Cole said. "Yep, this makes the fifth in three days. And now there's something else."

"Something else?" Miller frowned, puzzled.

"Something very much else." Cole dug into his pocket and withdrew a sheaf of notes. "When five apparently harmless, patients go violently mad that's not so awful. But when you look at these admissions figures"—Cole tossed the notes across the desk—"and find that ninety per cent of the patients admitted at Queens County Hospital during the past week were suffering from malignant tumors and some peculiar cancer types, you begin to smell something rotten somewhere."

"It's unbelievable," gasped Miller. He scanned the notes hurriedly and then looked up at Cole. "Unbelievable."

"It's worse," answered Cole, his voice crisp. "I haven't got the reports yet, but wait until you see those diagnoses. Cancer! What's wrong with those patients just vaguely resembles cancer. I tell you, Chief, we're up against an epidemic of something that hasn't yet been seen inside the pages of a medical book!"

"You're mad!" shouted the director. "A new disease? That's impossible."

"See for yourself," answered Cole. He grabbed Miller's arm, pulled him to the door. "They've all been placed up in the South Wing. Come and take a look."

The two men walked quickly to the elevator and were whisked up to the Roentgenology Floor.

Reaching the floor above, they walked slowly around the great, high-ceilinged room that was lined with beds. The sight that met their eyes

was almost incredible. The patients lay restlessly, in no pain whatever. The charts showed normal temperature, normal pulse, normal blood counts, and thoroughly normal data for each. But nevertheless the patients were sick, for all had changed from thoroughly healthy specimens to misshapen, distorted caricatures of humanity.

Some had suddenly sprouted miniature legs on one shoulder or developed extra fingers in the middle of the palms. Others were turning Cyclopean, one great eye bulging out in the middle of the forehead. There were patients with small spheres budding over the entire body that turned them into human mulberries.

All were twisted and changed, as though Nature had suddenly decided to add extra lumps of clay to the human race, willy-nilly.

"How long has this been going on?" whispered Miller. "Why hasn't there been word in the papers?"

"Less than a week. These growths practically expand under your eyes. It's as though human flesh has suddenly taken on independent life of its own."

Cole lit a cigarette, puffed nervously.

"About those patients who suddenly went mad," he went on. "The first one died. Jumped from the fifth floor. Well, we had a post mortem." Cole nodded at the glint in the other's eye. "You've guessed again, haven't you? Yes, it was tumor of the brain drove him mad. God! There's no telling what the infective source is. There's no telling who may be hit next—or where. These growths develop damnably fast. You or I may have the germ of horror growing within us this minute . . . to push out anywhere, even in the brain. And it's going to spread fast, too. From epidemic to endemic and from endemic to pandemic. Miller, we've got to do something to stop this before the city finds out!"

BUT the city did find out. Slowly but inexorably, with the low steady march of news that had all the relentlessness of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony.

On Monday the *Times* ran an editorial directed against the slipshod

methods of Queens County Hospital, where seventeen mad patients had run riot for three hours. And on one of the back pages was an obscure item about a two-headed snake that had been found in the Central Park Zoo.

Tuesday papers announced a sudden onslaught of horrible murders, evidently the work of a new crime band, somewhat similar to the late Murder, Inc., ring. The newspapers also reported the statement of Professor Higgleston at Columbia University, who alleged he had seen a swarm of pterodactyls roosting in the eaves of the Museum of Art.

But when Wednesday morning came around and half the city went to work to find that the other half was mysteriously absent, matters turned suddenly from the casual to the serious. The telephone company was forced to suspend service when hordes of key technicians failed to report. The morning newspapers were not on the stands. Half the shops were closed, half the police force off duty, half of all communications silenced. The city was half-stifled, choking with stagnation.

Citizens returned home almost immediately to get to their radios and wait for some news that would give them a clue. At home they found themselves surrounded with a monstrous sickness whose only symptoms were the horrible distortions of its victims, distortions that they had laughed at only a few days before. The radios failed to explain much. Newscasters told their listeners what they already knew. Told them that half the city was stricken with a strange new blight that was turning man into a caricature of himself.

In the Queens County Hospital there was no time to wait for bulletins over the air. Admissions had jumped so high there was no time nor reason to calculate it in terms of percentage.

The staff worked indiscriminately. Nurses took over, orderlies took over, even probationers were suddenly elevated to R.N.s and pitched in to help stem the hopeless tide.

Only Doctor Cole stood back just enough to try for a clear comprehensive view. Restlessly he roamed the wards and temporary sick rooms of the hospital, hunting, searching for some tell-

tale clue that might give the stricken city the relief it needed so urgently.

"It isn't cancer," he muttered over and over, "at least not the cancer we've known. There's no sense diagnosing. But what's the infective agent? Bacteria? Protozoa? Virus? What the devil could it be?"

HE ran down to Pathology and peered in. Alone in a welter of topsy-turvy apparatus sat Dr. Dunn.

"Well?" asked Cole.

Dunn shrugged wearily.

"Nothing," he said, "nothing at all. I've sectioned and used every stain known to the business. I've been working for hours." He blinked bloodshot eyes. "And there's nothing. I'm afraid I can't hold out much longer. Maybe it's got me. What's the first symptom?"

"That's the hell of it," answered Cole. "There just isn't any symptom."

He patted Dunn on the shoulder and wandered out. Well, he hadn't expected quick results, anyway. Best thing would be to look for possible modes of infection. What could hit an entire city so fast? Water supply?

He ran down to the staff house and changed to his street clothes. His car almost out of gas, he stopped off at a station. When no one answered his persistent honking, he was forced to help himself from the tank. Then he turned north and drove swiftly toward the city. The road was deserted.

The grass in the ditch, Cole noticed, was thicker than usual, heavy-stemmed and clotty like thick stalks of spaghetti. The whole countryside, for that matter, was slowly turning lumpy and grotesque. Trees sported humps and bulges on their boles. Bushes were discolored coral clumps.

And then, to send a chill down his spine, Cole began to notice lumbering forms lurking far in the background. Creatures that had once been humans and animals, but now were savage-looking monsters. Cole pressed his foot down on the accelerator in quick fear and with his free hand felt hastily for the revolver in the side pocket of his car. It made him feel a little better when he had transferred it to his own jacket.

The city streets were even more ap-

palling than the suburbs. The deserted buildings with horrible forms lurking in the shadows; normal-looking individuals every once in a long while scurrying as if for dear life's sake; the heaps of smashed-up cars at odd corners that made progress a painful series of detours. It was almost an hour before Cole reached the Department of Water Supply.

Only an old clerk was left in the office. He was an old white-haired man who sat easily in the superintendent's chair and greeted Cole with a toothless smile.

"Too old for it, I am," he said, "that plague likes 'em young and tender like you."

"Never mind that," said Cole angrily. "I'm from Queens County Hospital. I want to know about the water supply."

"What?" asked the clerk. "You got to ask me. I'm the Department now."

"Know anything about infection of the city's water?"

"There ain't been none. They checked all that before they got took sick."

"Sure?"

"Yep."

What next? Cole turned uneasily and thought hard. Food? There might be some officials left at the Health Department. He ran through the ominous streets, looking behind constantly. At last he reached the new Health and Sanitation Building. Irony of ironies, he thought grimly, if they're all stricken. He ran shouting through the long echoing corridors.

They all were.

BUT in the inspector's office he found a report. He checked hastily. Milk absolutely safe. Three score public markets tested in key positions throughout the city, and all reported negative. Sewage negative. Rivers negative. Where, in God's name, was the infection coming from? From the skies? Perhaps.

Cole trotted back to his car, thinking desperately. This might be something like cosmic ray infection. A new type of solar radiation or barrage . . . something wild. Like—

Oh!

He reeled back from a sudden blow,

rolled over and glanced up hastily. The Thing he saw made his blood run cold. Long arms and a crocodile skin with talonlike teeth that glittered. Cole pulled his knees back as the Thing dived at him. He kicked savagely, driving his heels into the chest. It grunted, blowing a gust of charnel breath in his face, paused, then plunged at him again.

Cole caught it with one heel and pushed it to the pavement. In another second he had the revolver out and fired point-blank from the hip. The Thing staggered back from the smash of the thirty-eight, gasped hoarsely and plodded toward him again.

Horried, Cole stepped back and fired once more, carefully at the head. This time it halted, knelt slowly and at last toppled to the ground, a shuddering Thing that had once been a man.

But the shooting had attracted attention. Cole heard sounds and saw shapes looming up from the tight little side streets of City Hall. Panic-stricken, he sprinted for the car. The motor choked and ground but would not take. Cole leaned over and locked both doors. Once more he tried the starter. As the engine turned and hic-coughed he heard scratches on the doors. He turned, caught a horrible glimpse of weird faces. Then a fist smashed through the window and at that instant the motor caught. Cole slammed into gear and sped the car off just as claws reached for his throat. The acceleration tumbled his attackers from the running board. He was safe—so far.

CHAPTER II

First Clues

COLE headed up Broadway and tried to soothe his jagged nerves. He'd learned something. The things were almost impossible to kill. He'd have to get plenty of ammunition.

The shambles through which he drove were maddening. He wondered how long it would be before he too succumbed. Perhaps he wouldn't at all, though, he speculated. Evidently

a certain percentage of the city had immunity to the mysterious blight.

Cole turned on the radio, just in case. He caught the announcer's flash:

"—epidemic the United States has ever known. Aid is being rushed to New York at once, although the Government does not state whether it will arrive in time. New York has not answered any kind of communication for the past twelve hours and there is the terrible possibility that there is no one living. The entire region over a thirty-mile square has been isolated under strict quarantine. This broadcast is being specially directed toward the city from Philadelphia in the hopes that those who are still safe will know that aid will arrive within eight hours—"

Eight hours!

Cole turned East to Madison Avenue, drove swiftly uptown and yanked to a halt before Abercrombie. He headed for the game department, deciding that it was time to supply himself with a heavier revolver and plenty of ammunition. On his way out he was amazed to discover over thirty people, perfectly sane and normal, living in the basement of the store. They had been there since the plague had broken out in its virulent form.

Just as a check, Cole drove past the 42nd Street subway entrance and dropped in to investigate. Here, too, he found hundreds of normal people who had taken the underground as a refuge. They were living there cheerful, unharmed. Perplexed, Cole started the car and sped back to the hospital. This was his first break. He didn't yet know what the blight was or what it meant, but he did know that people who were underground were safe from its dangers. Why? There had to be a reason.

At the hospital, Cole was horrified to discover the gates open and unguarded. He turned up the driveway and inched slowly across the grounds, peering from side to side. No guards? That meant something wrong. He stopped the car and was about to get out when a small geyser of dirt flicked up before him and he heard the rip of a shot from the staff house.

Cole squinted and saw white uniforms leaning from the windows and beckoning at him. Quickly he drove down the length of the grounds and

into the small garage behind the house. He darted up the steps. The door opened, and he was yanked into an excited crowd of doctors and nurses.

"No one's safe in the Main Building," came the hasty explanations. "Homicidal mania's spreading like wildfire."

"All of them?" he gasped.

Little Dr. Dunn shouldered forward. Cole was glad to see the pathologist still healthy.

"Not all," answered Dunn. "About twenty per cent."

"What about the rest?"

"Monstrous-looking . . . terrified . . . irritable, but no more dangerous than an ordinary mob of humans."

"No more dangerous!" Cole grinned sourly. "You ever hear of lynching?"

There was an uncomfortable shuffle in the group and Cole changed the topic hastily.

"Listen," he said, "I think I've got a little information that might help. Where's Miller?"

Dunn's face fell. "Disappeared," he said at length. "Maybe it got him or maybe they got him. Can't tell."

"Too bad." Cole paused, thoughtful. He realized what a keen blow Miller's loss would be to them. Then he began briskly: "Anyway, I've discovered that living underground seems to ward off infection. Does that mean anything to any of you?"

NO one answered until a voice grumbled from the background.

"Suffering sinus, I'm only a doctor!"

There was enough of a laugh to relieve the tension. They settled down as best they could to exchange information.

"I need statistics," Cole told them. "If you could give me enough facts I might be able to draw up an empirical theory about this crazy business. We've got to do something before the relief gets here or they'll walk smack into slaughter."

No one answered. They had nothing to contribute.

"Simmons? Carmichael? Allen? Doesn't anybody know anything?"

"Er . . . Doctor Cole . . ." She was a plain-looking nurse he didn't know from Eve.

"Well?" he demanded abstractedly.

"Reports were sent in to Director Miller's office, covering every phase of the epidemic."

"Yes?" Cole urged eagerly.

"Unfortunately, the report is probably where I last saw it—on Director Miller's desk."

Cole stood up, wrapt in thought, amid the disgruntled exclamations that followed. For the first time in the rapid series of events of the past week he felt the sore need of Miller's driving force and keen executive ability. Miller was an organizer and leader, by nature suited to bring order out of chaos. At last Cole shrugged and looked around.

"Well," he said, "I guess I'll just have to get them their reports." He shook off their protests, inspected his new gun, and prepared to leave. Then Dunn came up and took his arm.

"See here, Lewis," he said, "if you must go, why not minimize the risk? Now I know this much. The harmless variety won't bother you if you don't incite them. The violent ones will tear at anything that remotely resembles a normal individual. Let's get you a disguise."

They dashed through the staff house searching for make-up. Simmons admitted to a love of amateur theatricals and supervised the facial distortions. They mixed flour with water and pasted lumps over Cole's face, stuffed his clothes with lumpy pillows and mottled his skin with paints. When Simmons was done, Cole walked crookedly down to the main building and shuffled inside.

He spent a harrowing hour in Miller's office amidst shambling, screaming monstrosities, literally fighting his way to the desk. It was overturned, the papers scattered all over. Cole felt his position so precarious he was forced to scoop up armfuls of paper and ram them into his shirt, hoping the reports would be included. At last he fought his way outside and ran back to the staff house.

WHILE he showered and had a little supper he told the others about the hospital-shambles. Then they settled down in the library and sifted through the papers. In his haste, Cole had been unable to eliminate the

chaff. He found bills for stationary, requests for favors . . . all the tedious business that Miller was accustomed to take in his stride. Then Cole unearthed a receipted bill for raw beef bones—six thousand dollars' worth. He fingered it curiously, wondering what earthly use the director could have had for such material, and then went on with the serious work.

The reports that he and the others examined were critical and laughable by turns. Some were imaginative and spoke of Martians and the red plague. Others were too brief, too tragically succinct. There were hundreds of questions that could be asked, questions that would have to remain unanswered. At last Cole looked at the sorry little list he had gleaned from the mass and arose.

"Well," he said, "we don't know an awful lot. I've managed to bring back a pile of paper and one picture, the latter included by mistake. The total facts we've been able to gather are: one, that people underground are not affected; two, that although the growths affect humans haphazardly they seem to affect vegetative life uniformly."

"How's that?" someone called.

"When I say uniformly," explained Cole, "I mean that all reports show that only one side of trees and tall brush is affected. The humps protrude the entire length of the bole, but only on one side!"

"Like moss growing on the north side?"

"That's just about it," laughed Cole. "Now in addition to these findings, I made one other that may or may not bear on the case. While I was lurking around the hot houses I happened to look in. *The vegetative growths there were absolutely normal!*"

Dunn whistled in amazement.

"Just what it means, though, I couldn't say," continued Cole.

"Never mind about that for the time being," interrupted Simmons. "I've an idea. Let's assume this epidemic is a result of some radiation form. X-rays can produce something like this. Then the natural question is: where's the source of radiation?"

"Perhaps from overhead. Cosmic, or something—"

"Not when you look at those trees," answered Simmons.

"Right!" snapped Cole. "The rest of you get the idea? Simmons is suggesting that the ulcerated side of the tree points toward the source of radiation."

"So?"

"So we'll do a little research. Suppose we take the principle of the radio direction finder. In other words, let's go out, dig up some accurate compasses, and plot the direction of tumors on trees over a wide stretch. Say as far east as Port Jefferson and west to Sommerville or High Bridge. It'll take some time, but I think it's worth the few hours. We can plot the directions. The radiation source should be pretty close to the intersection of those lines."

CHAPTER III

Station Death

IT was quite dark when seven of the hospital's staff squeezed into the car with Cole. They headed for New York, ferreted out three other cars, and broke into an instrument shop for the necessary equipment. At last they split to cover their assignments.

Cole and Dunn, who had the New York sector, drove in silence, watching the streets cautiously. The occasional normal-looking humans they saw scurrying down the side streets showed them that the infection had not attacked the entire population. The sight of that immunity strengthened their faith in their own. Reflecting on the curious enigma of immunity, Cole questioned his companion.

"I don't know the answer," said Dunn. "There are two factors that might operate. First, the external and internal coatings of the individual furnish mechanical protections against infection. Second, the insusceptible individual contains no receptors for the infection. That is to say, no organic substratum exists upon which the invasion can anchor."

"Seems to me," said Cole, "that our immunity should be a matter of me-

chanical skin protection, since we suspect ray infection."

"Very likely," Dunn nodded. "Probably all of us have an unknown skin quality in common. Perhaps the answer lies in skin pigmentation. But there's not enough time to find out." He shrugged.

Turning north on Fifth Avenue, the car passed Sherman's statue and sped along the east side of the Park. The hideous shrubbery and monstrous creatures that twisted and stumbled through the broken branches made them shudder. After a pause, Dunn nudged Cole.

"By the way," he asked, "who was in that one picture you found in Miller's office?"

"Miller," was the answer. "Miller and a man by the name of Gurwitsch. Just one of those informal snapshots. Must have been on Miller's desk. Funny I never noticed it before."

"Not the Alexander Gurwitsch?"

"The very same. Miller studied with him for three years. I don't suppose you knew our director was a damned fine zoologist before he took over the reins?"

"I didn't," answered Dunn. "But if he worked under Gurwitsch he worked with the best. A. G. has done some remarkable things with abnormal plant growth."

"Abnormal plant growth?" echoed Cole.

"Yep. Report in the *Journal of Zoology*. Look it up in the staff library some time when you get the chance."

They proceeded unmolested to the north end of Central Park and took a dozen careful compass readings. As they turned south again and drove downtown, they were horrified to see a dull red glow on the horizon that could mean only one thing—that the city was in flames.

Central Park South was filled with hordes of hoarse-shouting, gesticulating creatures who were rioting with flaming torches. The two men, watching carefully, saw to their amazement that the mobs were being led by leaders clad in peculiar, white, semi-transparent suits, with hoods that covered their heads.

DISMAYED at the chaotic turn of events, Dunn turned the car toward home and sped rapidly toward the bridge. But at Canal Street Cole suddenly ordered Dunn to stop and, to the latter's bewilderment, vaulted out and disappeared into the darkness. There was the sound of running feet, an exclamation and the *plunk* of a fist meeting a jaw. Presently Cole returned with a piece of glossy material in his hand.

"Saw one of the Boys in White," he explained, "and I wanted to get a look at their uniforms. Here's a hunk. What d'you make of it?"

Dunn took the strip of uniform and fingered it meditatively.

"Feels like a gelatin cloth to me," he said.

"Me, too," answered Cole. "But why gelatin? And why a uniform?"

"I think the radio might give us the answer. The gentle Boys in White seem to be doing all right when it comes to inciting to riot. Probably a nice little organization!" Dunn reached down and switched on the radio.

"—in this time of chaos. Citizens of New York, our homes, our country, our lives and the lives of those we love are in the highest danger. New York has been attacked. The time has come to declare that a most critical emergency exists. The existing government is inadequate to handle the situation. In such emergency, when the same peril may attack all our other cities at any moment, I appeal to you to join my Army of Health. Support me and I pledge that normality will be restored and the country healed. Seek out any man you see in white uniform and say you want to aid the Healer. The Healer is the only man who can save the country—"

"Pretty, isn't it?" Dunn clicked off the set and sneered. "The cleverest technique for setting up a dictatorship I've heard of in a long time. From healing the country it'll be just one short step to taking over the country."

"Yes, but why gelatin uniforms?" persisted Cole.

"Simple. Kills two birds with one stone. Probably this Healer has started all the trouble. Probably manufactured and sent out the uniforms to his men in advance. They must immunize the wearers."

"Perhaps—" mused Cole. He was silent for the rest of the trip home.

The other explorers had not yet returned when they reached the staff house. Cole ran up to the library, got a few books, and locked himself in his room with instructions that he be called when all had arrived.

The long hours of the night dragged interminably while the besieged staff kept close watch and listened to the mad sounds that echoed across the grounds from the hospital buildings. At last a car drove up to the house, followed by a second and later a third. The excited searchers called Cole and all crowded into the dining room for another conference.

"While Dunn is plotting the radiation lines on the map," said Cole, "let me tell you what we've learned. We find that the source of infection is a radiation. How? From a series of clues.

"First: I've checked almost every possible mechanical means of contamination and found all negative.

"Second: there is the all important evidence of the tree and shrub infections. I don't think anyone will deny that evidence points to a radiation flowing from a definite quarter . . ." He paused and looked around. Simmons came up grinning and placed a map in his hand.

"Moreover," continued Cole, "there's other evidence. Why were the plants in the hot-house unaffected? Why are people living underground unharmed? Obviously, they are protected from the harmful exposure."

“WHAT'S this mysterious exposure?" demanded a score of voices.

"I don't know," answered Cole, "but I can tell you a simple story that will explain a lot. Biologists at the All-Union Institute of Experimental Medicine at Moscow have been experimenting with the reproduction rate of living tissue. They noticed that cell division frequently followed a definite rhythm and concluded that it might originate in neighboring cells.

"They set up an experiment. Taking young slender roots, they placed one so that its tip pointed directly at a side of a second. The first they called the biological cannon, the second the

detector. They permitted the two roots to remain in this position for three hours. Then the detector was sectioned and the number of cell divisions on both sides of the root were counted. In the exposed area about one-fourth more divisions were discovered. Apparently, the biological gun made a difference.

"The experiment was tried more than a hundred times, and each time the results were the same. It was tried but with a thin sheet of quartz interposed and again the results were the same. But when a thin sheet of glass was used, or when the quartz was coated with gelatin, the effect ceased. Now, you all know that quartz is transparent to ultra-violet rays—while glass and gelatin are opaque—" He paused meaningly.

The others stirred amazedly and stared at the young scientist.

"From all these considerations," continued Cole, "they concluded that the influence might be an ultra-violet radiation generated by the cells of the sender. Since it was the increasing rate of mitosis that had betrayed the emissions, they were named mitogenetic rays. Gentlemen, I'm of the opinion that our city is being bombarded with some new and extremely powerful form of these mitogenetic rays. All the evidence points to it . . ."

"How about the hot-houses?" called Dunn.

"That, too. Queens Hospital happens to have plain glass hot-houses. Ordinary glass, like gelatin, blocks off mitogenetic rays. Those men, the organizers of the man who calls himself the Healer, wear gelatin uniforms . . . obviously to protect themselves from these mitogenetic rays. Last of all, our search has shown that these rays emanate from a common focal point." He held up the map. "A point at Black Tor, some twenty miles above New York on the Hudson. I don't know what the Healer is using for his murderous work, but one thing is self-evident. We've got to get up there and destroy it!"

There followed a chaotic half hour while men were selected and the little arms and ammunition they possessed were distributed. At last sixteen in

all assembled in the dining room for a last word before setting out.

"We've got to get through," Cole told them. "The Healer is broadcasting death and destruction from Black Tor. If we can smash him, the entire campaign will collapse. Remember that we'll accomplish more if we're cautious. Stop off in New York and pick up all the weapons you can use. If you get the chance to hijack a man's uniform, do it."

"Why not manufacture our own out of gelatin before we go up there?" asked Simmons.

"Not enough time, in the first place. In the second, this may be a special gelatin-fabric that may take too long to duplicate."

"But why get suits at all?"

"Dunn and I have agreed that our immunity results from some unknown skin quality which affords mechanical protection to the mitogenetic rays. But as we approach the source of the emanations they'll grow tremendously stronger—remember the law of inverse squares—strong enough perhaps to break through our normal skin protection. We can't even take that chance. All right, now! No more discussion. Take any route north you like . . . but be at Chanceville, just below Black Tor, by five o'clock!"

CHAPTER IV

Men in White

IT was four-thirty when Cole reached Chanceville, and two of the other cars were already waiting on the turnpike. The trip up had been horrible, for the closer they approached the source of the barrage, the more horrible the distortions of men and growths had become.

"Hey—look at the Tor!" Dunn pointed excitedly as the black peak loomed up in the distance. A thin, almost imperceptible radiance played in a halo around the tip, a radiance of subtle pastels. It flickered and swayed like dancing fire imps. For long minutes the two men stared, fascinated. At last Cole snapped his fingers.

"Five o'clock," he said. "Can't wait any longer. Let's get on."

In single file the twelve men paced noiselessly down the road. A hundred yards beyond the cars they came to a turn and presently sighted the outlying homes of the town. It was getting light quite rapidly and there was an urgent need to get past the barracks before they were seen.

They were almost past the big town hall that Simmons pointed out as the barracks when the interruption came. Three white-clad sentinels rounded a corner and started at the sight of men but a few feet away. One cried: "Halt!" and fumbled at a holster. The others darted forward, yanking at their belts.

Cole swung up the rifle he was carrying and swung it butt-foremost in a mighty arc that cracked sickeningly against the head of the leader. He went down with a coughing grunt and rolled against the legs of the second who tripped and fell. The remaining man let out a frightened howl and fired his revolver blindly before a shot from behind Cole dropped him in his tracks.

But at that instant the barracks disgorged a thin stream of uniformed men who closed in on them.

"This way!" yelled Cole. He turned and sprinted into a narrow lane between two houses. The others followed. Behind him Cole heard blows and struggling bodies. Then he was in a backyard. Lithely, he vaulted a high board fence. He dropped down on the other side and waited until he was followed by another figure in white, Dunn.

"Where're the others?" he whispered.

DUNN motioned with his head toward the barracks.

They set off at a low crouching run until they were clear of the town and then straightened to take the steep road that led to the mountain top. The half-light of the dawn brightened rapidly and high above them loomed Black Tor. Through the trees they could make out the glint of metal, the outlines of a giant structure poised at the tip of the peak. Still they tore up the jagged, twisted mountain until at last they sighted a high barbed-wire fence.

It was close-meshed, heavy and over

ten feet high, braced with rough steel stanchions set in concrete piers. A hundred yards above the fence, masked by wild bushes, was a high-towered stone mansion that looked like a medieval observatory. At the top was an all too modern turret of twentieth century metal. There was only one gate to the fence in view, at the head of the road, and that was guarded by a squad of ten men.

"How in blazes are we going to get through?" muttered Cole. "We can't take any chances. Want to bluff?"

"I can get you in," answered Dunn. "Listen—"

They held a whispered conference, then Dunn took the rifle and crept into the forest alongside the road. In a few minutes a shot rang out as he began a miniature war with the guards before the gate. Taking advantage of the excitement, Cole dashed up to the fence. He listened to the excited reports of the guards, peered in the direction of the unknown assailant, then nodded and dashed up the slope toward the tower as if running for aid. He yanked open the heavy oak door and slammed it shut behind him, breathing deeply in pretended relief.

As he looked around the small ante-room in which he found himself, he heard a step. An officer thrust aside a curtain and entered.

"What the hell's the trouble out there?" snapped the officer.

"There's an attack on the tower, sir."

The officer started and turned to bark a command to the guards in the room behind him. Cole took a quick step and jabbed the muzzle of his revolver into the officer's back.

"All right," he said tersely, "tell them to back up against the walls." The officer hesitated and felt the gun prod him fiercely. He gave the command. Cole shoved the man before him and stepped quickly across the guard room until he reached the closed door at the far side. He swung the officer around, reached for the knob and opened it a fraction. Then he yanked open the door, darted through swiftly and banged it shut behind him.

To the right he saw a flight of stone steps. He darted up them. Behind him the door burst open and a shot

cracked out as the officer dashed after him. Cole reached the turn in the stairs and pelted on up until he was at the first landing. Below him came the trample of pursuit. He half stumbled up the remaining flight to the first floor as the others came around the turn.

Another shot and a cry from below, then he was through a door and had slammed it behind him. There was no key in the lock. He turned to see a bewildered man in uniform arise from a radio control board and snatch a pair of ear-phones off his head.

"Trouble!" cried Cole hoarsely. He nodded his head toward the door. "You've got to hold them off for awhile. I'm going up to report."

THE radio operator nodded and pointed through the control room. Cole dashed on to a narrow spiraling sweep of iron steps and went clanging up their twisting heights. He heard the dim repercussions of splintering wood down there and savage shouting. Then bullets were whamming and whining through the metal girder-work.

Cole thought his heart was going to burst with the strain of plunging up those incredibly steep stairs. Then he had reached a small platform beyond which were two curtained doors. He paused for a moment in indecision, wondering whether to dart in or continue his flight up the twining stairs toward the tower's top. But many feet were crashing on the metal and he was sure they might wing him before he reached the top.

Cole turned to the right and jumped through the door into a large room, lined with windows on one side. He darted over for a look down and saw he was high above the ground. He looked around wildly. This was some kind of biological lab. No place to hide here.

He continued through two other rooms and then found himself in another laboratory. Long tables were laden with microscopes and a huge condenser glittered in the bright morning sunshine. The uproar of the pursuit was swelling behind him and before him, until he felt he was surrounded with sound. The door at the far end

was locked. He turned the key carefully and peered out. Then his heart sank as he realized something abruptly. The tower was round, of course. He had sped around the periphery of rooms and come back to the same iron landing!

The stairs were covered with guards, crowded together, talking and gesticulating. Fresh men were squirming up the stairs from below, asking questions, telling about the skirmish outside, hearing about the crazy guy within. Behind him Cole heard the pursuers dashing through the laboratory. He took a breath, opened the door softly and slipped through, the key still in his hand.

He stood, back to door, and fumbled desperately to press the key home and twist it. After a moment's work he caught the key in the slot. As steps ran forward inside, he twisted it and felt the door quiver under an onslaught of knocks.

"It's locked, sir," he called.

"I know that, you blasted fool!" came the officer's voice. Other guards crowded up behind him to listen. He slipped the key out again and tucked it up the sleeve of his uniform.

"What shall we do, sir?" asked Cole. "There's no key out here."

"I know that, too," snapped the officer impatiently. "Some of you come inside to search. He must be here. The rest watch those steps."

Cole turned and looked at the other guards. They shrugged and sauntered lazily through the open door.

"Hey," a voice called — a familiar voice. "We ought to watch the top of them stairs, huh?" Cole stared and almost fainted from the shock.

"Right!" he managed to call. "Come with me. We'll go above."

They pushed through the crush and took stations a few yards up the spiral staircase. Cole trembled with anxiety until they were a little beyond earshot.

"For heaven's sake," he whispered from the corner of his mouth, "how did you do it?"

"Simple," answered Dunn. "You sent out scouts. I pretended I was one, too. I hunted around for myself for awhile and then reported back to the gate. Then we all heard the trouble in-

side and I came on up. One nice thing about a uniform. If you've got it on your best enemy won't know you."

"I'm glad to see you," whispered Cole fervently. "Come on, let's sneak aloft. There's not much time."

Carefully they backed up the stairs, a step at a time, until they were concealed by the mesh and intermesh of iron grid-work. Then they turned and ran swiftly up until they reached the head where a guard already stood before a heavy metal panel.

"Guard change," said Cole. The man saluted, started down. They waited until he disappeared and then tried the panel. It slid aside weightily. They passed through into a small hatchway. Barring the door, they mounted the hatch and came up to a broad open floor of polished glass, covered with apparatus.

"This," gasped Dunn, "must be it! The machine that's responsible for the plague!"

CHAPTER V

The Healer

SUDDENLY they were aware of the thundering drone and the crackling discharges. The tower head, almost twenty feet in diameter, was filled with what appeared to be a giant gun or electrode. It reared up from the floor, from a welter of smaller mechanical adjustments, coils and wires, like a mechanical imitation of a prehistoric mastodon. The insulated masonry supports were like great haunches. A nightmare of contacts, switchpoints and tube dischargers, it resembled a barrel-like body, and an ovate steel head lengthened to a short ugly muzzle.

The thing was pointing south, and it shook and trembled in the droning roar of its power. They could see serried ranks of Coolidge tubes discharging and glowing, hear the whispered force of the muzzle emanation, smell the overpowering odor of ionization.

"God!" breathed Cole, "what a thing!" He stepped forward instinctively, followed by Dunn. Suddenly a

voice behind them cried out:

"Stop, you blasted idiots!"

A huge man, in uniform, stood at a small archway behind them.

"How many times do I have to warn you?" he shouted angrily. "You can't go within ten feet of that projector unless you want to fry. And what the hell are you doing up here?"

"Can't tell you in this noise, sir," called Cole.

"All right, come into the workshop."

The man stood to one side, a massive figure in the bulky hooded uniform, while they passed into a small work-lab. Then he slammed shut the thick door and faced them.

"Well," he demanded sharply, "what do you want? I gave orders I was not to be disturbed."

Cole stood silent for a breath, his fingers trembling on the butt of his revolver. Then he sighed quite audibly and looked up.

"Oh worshipful Healer," he said bitterly, "I'm the bearer of evil tidings. On second thought, Mr. Miller, you'd better remove the mask!"

The world seemed to stand still. They heard the rumble of the projector through the heavy door, and Miller drew in several sharp breaths. Then, with the violence of a volcanic eruption, he went into action. His arms flung out and seized little Dunn by arm and shoulder and half-threw him into Cole's body.

As the two men reeled back he turned and yanked at the heavy work-lab door. He was halfway through before Cole managed to disentangle himself and leap in pursuit.

Cole caught up with Miller beyond the archway and threw himself at the latter's flying legs. His shoulder clipped against the calves, bringing the big man down with a crash. Cole scrambled forward on hands and knees and clinched with Miller, and the two, clawing and pummeling, strained to their feet. They stood, feet planted, trading punches savagely for almost a minute. Then there was a flicker of white at Cole's side and a whirl of arms.

MILLER cried out and staggered back. He teetered for an instant and staggered back another few feet.

The projector roared up suddenly and his body stiffened like a puppet jerked by a string.

There came a series of crackling discharges and a violet aura played around Miller's body while his limbs danced and twitched in a mad jig. Slowly he began to crumble and brown, and his body sank to the polished floor.

The reek of roasting flesh filled the chamber. The two men turned sickly and ran back into the lab.

"What did you do?" asked Cole at last.

"What I had to." Dunn shook his head. "While you were punching him I sneaked around and cracked his skull open with the rifle."

Cole nodded and sat for awhile.

"How'd you know it was Miller?" Dunn queried after awhile.

"Tell you later." Cole pulled himself together. "Right now we've got to destroy that machine completely. Otherwise they might be able to get it back into action in a few hours."

"Well?"

Cole paced around the laboratory and thought desperately. He picked up a few reagent bottles, read their labels and smiled slowly.

"Did you know," he began absently, "I was almost busted out of Columbia for—"

"For what?"

"Never mind now." Cole hunted around the room for equipment with revitalized energy. "I've got a tough job for you, Dunn. Go below and bring me a guard. If you can't get the guard, at least get a uniform. An extra uniform, get it?"

Dunn was out of the lab in a flash and tumbling down the hatchway. He slid aside the outer panel and peered down the stairs. Through the cross-hatch he was able to discern a solitary guard mounted at the lower landing where the search for Cole was still in disgruntled progress. Evidently most of the men had already been sent below.

He tiptoed down until he was a few yards distant, then gradually craned over the edge of the balustrade, swinging his rifle by the muzzle at the end of his arm. The butt hung a few feet behind the guard's head. Dunn flexed his wrist fiercely and swished the heavy

pendulum forward. The guard crumpled with a clash of equipment to the steps. Instantly, Dunn leaped down the last few yards, heaved the inert body to his shoulder, picked up the rifle, and tottered back up the stairs.

In the hatchway he threw down the unconscious man and ripped off his uniform. He slung the body outside the panel, slammed the door and dashed back up to the laboratory, carrying the rifle and the heavy folds of gelatinous material.

"Rip off the zippers and snaps," said Cole, busied over retorts, "and macerate the material for me, will you?"

In a few moments it was ready. Cole placed the heavy stuff in a large beaker and boiled it gently until it was quite liquid. He set it to cool and turned back to his own work of gently spraying a colorless fluid into a small vat of fuming cloudy substance. Dunn sniffed the acrid bite of nitric acid.

AS Cole poured the contents of the vat into the beaker, they heard the clang of steps on the stair below, steps receding into the distance.

"Guard's come to," breathed Dunn. "How much longer, Lewis? We haven't much time."

"Give me ten minutes."

With frantic fingers, Cole yanked cartridges from his belt and pried the bullet-heads from the shells. He dumped out the bound stalks of cordite, split open the bundles and began to lay a long string of individual stalks across the smooth floor of the projector room. Dunn pitched in, and together they laid a long train weaving in and out around the sides of the tower.

When they returned to the laboratory, the mass in the beaker had set into a huge lump of yellowish gelatin.

"Careful, now!" gasped Cole. He lifted up the beaker and carried it gently outside, placed it on the floor with open mouth adjacent to the end of the train.

"Mercury fulminate," he called to Dunn. "You'll find the powder in a watch crystal on the table."

Cole took the powder and heaped it in a pile just touching the gelatin and train. Then he arose painfully and bit his lip.

"Let's go," he said. He bent over again and applied a match to the far end of the train. The cordite flared and burned rapidly along its length. Dunn scooped up the rifles and together they dashed down the hatchway, and out on the stairs. They galloped down, three at a jump. As they reached the landing Dunn called:

"Stand by, Lewis, trouble ahead!"

The officer and guards were assembled on the landing with an excited, uniformless man. They glanced at Cole and Dunn and raised their rifles. Before a shot was fired, the two scientists had smashed into them, sending them reeling. They darted down the lower stairs. A volley roared after them, missed.

Far up the tower the shots continued to belch out. Then they had reached the bottom and were tearing through the radio room. The operator sprang to his feet. Cole sprinted past Dunn, swung up his rifle, and sent the man smashing back into his control board. They panted through the door, reached the head of the broad staircase, and there Dunn twisted his ankle. He collapsed like a deflated balloon, reeled and tottered forward down the broad expanse of steps like a rag doll.

Cole almost fell himself as he burst down with all the speed he could manage. Dunn was semi-conscious when he reached him. He tried to rise and slipped back again.

"Go ahead, Lewis," he grinned. "No Merriwell stuff!"

Cole cursed and picked up the light man and eased him over his shoulder. Feet were trampling down the staircase as he tugged open the guard room door and burst into the astonished group of men loitering there.

"Sick," he yelled. "I'm getting him below." He crossed the room in three giant steps and was through the curtain before they could answer.

HE must hurry. Time was precious. He managed to pull open the heavy outer door and was out in the open. The train wasn't too long. It was due any moment now. He lurched across the grounds, gasping with split lungs. The fence was a hundred yards distant. Would it be far enough?

Could he reach it before— A hundred yards. It seemed like a hundred miles. He heard men shouting behind him and suddenly the gate loomed up and he was surrounded by alert men with poised rifles. He sagged against the wire mesh, eyes popping with the strain.

And at that moment the tower blew up.

It seemed to shake itself loose from Black Tor and spray out against the bright morning sky. There was a titanic explosion and a hideous fountain of flames ripped down the length of the stone and masonry. It stopped and showed sudden space where solid brick had been a moment before. Then the concussion threw them to the ground and Cole lay amid the whistling fragments that rained down.

He thought he must have lost consciousness for a long time, for it seemed hours later when at last he arose and looked about. The tower was entirely demolished. Only a few fragments of the foundation still stood. The entire peak of the Tor was littered with chunks of broken stone and here and there he could see bewildered guards in torn uniforms struggling to their feet. But, curiously, the explosions still went on. He stared at the little craters of earth that blasted up over the peak.

"Give me a hand up, Lewis."

Startled, Cole saw that Dunn was apparently unharmed, although his left shoulder looked bloody and twisted. He raised him gently, then the two crouched back and wondered at the reason for the explosions. At last Dunn snapped his fingers.

"National Guard," he said, and tried a grin. "Isn't it just like them to get here too late? They're shelling the peak from below with a Stokes mortar. Probably they took that look around this morning and got the story from the boys below."

Cole nodded and, as if by common consent, they turned and hurried down the road away from the well meant destruction. A hundred yards below they paused to rip off the gelatin uniforms and stare down at the little town. They could see brown uniforms bustling about and the glitter of bayonets. For

some time they walked in silence and at last Dunn grunted and asked:

"How'd you do it, Lewis?"

"Blasting gelatin," answered Cole. "That's why I was almost busted out of Columbia. Learned how to make it at school. Explosives always were a hobby of mine."

"I see." Dunn sighed and tried to adjust his smashed shoulder a little. "Tell me, Lewis. How did you know it was Miller?"

"Oh, that! Well, you gave me the clue yourself. Remember the photograph of Miller and Gurwitsch? You mentioned at the time that Gurwitsch had done remarkable things with abnormal plant growth and told me to look it up in the *Journal of Zoology*. I did, and discovered it was Gurwitsch who had done the initial work on mitogenetic rays at the Moscow Institute."

"But just because Miller studied with him—" objected Dunn.

"Naturally that's not conclusive proof," interrupted Cole. "But there was another matter that seemed to clinch it. Among Miller's papers at the hospital I found a curious item. A bill for six thousand dollars' worth of raw

beef bones. Know what you make from bones? Gelatin. Yes! Miller had been preparing this coup for years. Manufactured his own special gelatin fabric for the uniforms in secret. He organized everything without a clue. Probably conceived the plan back in Moscow. Evidently he learned more than biology back there. He had the will to lead and direct, the love of authority and domination."

"I see," repeated Dunn. He gazed around at the cool morning with something of relief in his pain-stricken face. "I suppose this finishes it."

"Not quite," answered Cole slowly. "We've smashed the projector and its inventor, and the army's taking care of the Boys in White down there, but—" His eyes took in the stricken land and he pointed toward the distorted things. "No, our work's just beginning, Dunn. We must bring health and sanity back." Suddenly he noticed the revolver still clenched in his fist. He tossed it into the crackling brush with a shiver of unconcealed relief.

"Thank God," he said, "I've no more use for that. I'm a doctor—not a destroyer."

NEXT ISSUE

THE INDESTRUCTIBLE

The Story of a Baffling Nemesis in the Sky

By ROBERT ARTHUR

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SCIENTIFACTS

INCREDIBLE BUT TRUE

A SPECIAL FEATURE OF INTERESTING ODDITIES

by MORT WEISINGER

CYCLOPEAN VISION

FUTURE man will have one eye! Biologists report that nature is gradually working toward a single eye in the center of the face. Tests show



that many people have a dominant eye which does most of the seeing, just as most people are right-handed. The dominant eye does 90 percent of the seeing.

The effect of a dominant eye is to decrease stereoscopic vision. Things look flatter. Some biologists, looking thousands of years into the future, suggest that in time all our seeing may be done with one eye and that, in effecting the change, Nature will have moved the eye to the center of the forehead, turning us into a race of Cyclopes.

SCIENCE GIVES UP

SIMPLE science lists five absolute impossibilities!

You can't unroll tire tape without making light. The separation of the tightly adhering surfaces produces a glow easily visible in the dark.

You can't focus X-rays. There is no lens which refracts X-rays as a burning-glass focuses visible rays.

You can't use a siphon in a vacuum because it is the atmospheric pressure that forces the liquid up the short arm as soon as the long column of liquid begins to fall under its own weight.

It is absolutely impossible to shoot

a bullet from a revolver or a rifle horizontally. Regardless of its speed, the bullet always falls due to the effect of gravitation upon it. Consequently, the path of the bullet is curved.

You can't walk without generating electricity. Even if there is no friction the impact causes electrification.

THE FIVE-SENSE LIQUID

GINGER ALE is a five-sense liquid!

It is one of the few inanimate things known to science which can be tasted, smelled, heard, seen and felt without being touched!

You can taste ginger ale without touching it. Hold your tongue above a glass of the liquid, and the effervescent action will make bubbles fly onto the tongue. You can also hear ginger ale—its bubbling action gives forth a distinctly audible sound which may be heard by holding the ear in close proximity to the liquid. You can see it—that's obvious. You can feel it—the spray from the effervescing bubbles may be distinctly felt on the sensitive skin of the lips. And you can smell the liquid, by sniffing it an inch away.

STAR DUST

EVERY star must explode!

Astronomers report that at least twenty stars of our stellar universe explode yearly.

Since our Universe is about 2 billion years old, it follows that some 40 billion stars have already exploded during this period. On the other hand, our stellar system contains only about 40 billion individual stars.

Thus, we must conclude that practically every star must explode at least once during its evolutionary history. But the chance of our Sun's exploding within the next few years is still only

about one in several billions, so that such an explosion is much less probable than many other unpleasant events that can happen to humanity.

AIR THIEVES

BACTERIA in the ocean use up more oxygen than fish!

Oxygen in the ocean is probably used up more rapidly by bacteria and other micro-organisms than it is by all the fish, and other visible animals ranging from tiny shrimp to gigantic octopi, according to oceanography experts.

Bacteria swarm in the depths in incredible numbers. A quart of ocean water may contain anywhere from 100,000 to 10,000,000 bacteria, consuming oxygen at the rate of .001 cubic centimeter to more than one cubic centimeter per quart per year. This looks rather insignificant—but there is a staggering total of quarts of water in the ocean!

BOTANICAL DIVINING RODS

TREASURE-HUNTERS are using flowers to locate hidden minerals!

Modern mineralogists sleuth for valuable substances via botanical evidence.

For example, in Upper Silesia, and in some parts of Belgium, the profuseness of the calamine velvet, growing in out-of-the-way places, has, in every instance, resulted in the finding of valuable deposits of zinc ore being found below. Birch trees growing in great



profusion indicate iron ores beneath. The presence of the plant, the *Convolvulus althaeoides*, in certain sections of Spain, indicates the abundance of phosphate ores beneath the surface. Silver ore deposits seem to favor *Erigonum ovalifolium*.

In Michigan and Wisconsin, metallurgists, baffled by the profusion of a shrub known as *Amorpha canescens*

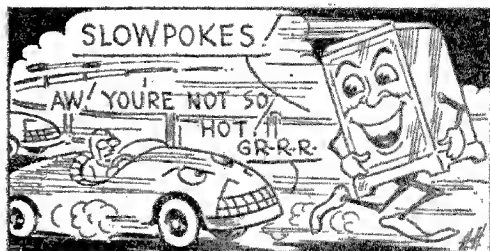
on land once considered of little value, thought fit to call in the help of botany experts. The botanists predicted that below.

And so it proved!

REFRIGERATOR MARATHON

THE "mileage" of the average electric refrigerator exceeds that of most automobiles!

Westinghouse engineers report that the compressor motor of an electric



refrigerator travels the equivalent of 250,000 miles in five years' normal operation—enough to carry it around the world 10 times if it could travel under its own power.

BLACKOUT BLUES BEATEN

SCIENCE is licking the blackout!

Blackouts in warring countries usually necessitate painting factory windows, so that electric lights are necessary in the daytime. In England, complete obliteration of windows is obviated by use of blue windows and orange lights.

During the day some daylight is transmitted, but at night the blue glass will not transmit outwardly the inner orange light, which is effectively filtered.

NATURE'S EXTREMES

NATURE has four extremes that can never be challenged!

Nothing can move faster than 670,000,000 miles per hour—the speed of light.

Nothing can be colder than absolute zero—273 degrees Centigrade.

Nothing can be smaller than the nucleus or core of an atom. Ten trillion would fill an inch.

No celestial body can get much hotter than from six to seven million degrees Centigrade! Above that, the

pressure of the light emitted would blow it up!

THIS INCREDIBLE WORLD

EIGHTY THOUSAND foot pounds of energy are used by an athlete in running 100 yards in 11 seconds, according to recent tests. . . . A single ton of high-carbon, cold-rolled strip steel will produce a million safety razor blades. . . . Someone has estimated that a half ton of candles would be required to produce the amount of light used monthly by the average American family. . . . The tiny crystals which are regimented, line after line, to make Polaroid, are so small that three billion of them would just about cover the head of a pin 1/6 of an inch in diameter. . . . Organic chemists of the world made approximately 25,000 new chemical compounds last year, an increase of about 6 percent. . . . The venom of the black widow spider is approxi-

mately 15 times more potent than that of the rattlesnake. . . .

There are 11 oil-wells in the United States which pump oil from under the ocean. . . . The instinct to keep flying in one direction is so strong in migrating butterflies that they have been known to fly through tunnels rather than make a slight detour. . . . Gasoline has an explosive power more than eighty times that of dynamite. . . . Carrier pigeons with a natural camouflage of mottled plumage are being bred for wartime use. . . . Desert turtles of the Southwest sometimes swallow enough water in a single drink to increase their weight forty per cent. . . .

The Thysania moth of Guatemala attains the phenomenal wingspread of more than twelve inches. . . . Paint experts say that an object may appear heavier in weight if painted red or orange, lighter in weight if colored blue or yellow. . . .



Coming in the March Issue of Our Companion Magazine

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BAD MEDICINE

By WILLIAM MORRISON

Author of "The Thirteenth Moon," "The Crystal Death," etc.



Meet the Scoundrels of the Spaceways as They Find That Cheating Cheaters is Universal

THE Saturnians had never seen anything like it, and they crowded around the novel space ship that Trenholm and O'Hara had set down among them. The native's broad good-natured faces were agape with excitement.

On the side of the ship was a flamboyant painting of an Indian girl holding aloft a bottle that contained The Red Man's Old-Fashioned Radio-active Herb Remedy, fortified with vitamins A to R inclusive, the latter made with the most recently discovered carbon isotope.

Beside the girl, there had originally been a sign announcing that the ship was the home of Trenholm and O'Hara's Gigantic Medicine Show, but the names of the owners had been painted out and replaced by the better serving names of the Jones Brothers. Trenholm and O'Hara, with understandable modesty, desired no publicity for themselves.

O'Hara was giving the Saturnians his usual spiel now.

The megapod turned upside down, Waloe clutching him desperately

"Come closer, ladies and gentlemen, come closer," he chanted. The ladies and gentlemen, eyes alight with expectation, obeyed. Their faces were elephantine, with huge flapping ears, but without trunks. And to O'Hara they brought back old memories of those ancient cartoons that in bygone days had depicted the Republican Party as a man with an elephant's head.

But it was not the heads that chiefly interested him. It was the rough, pink beads they wore around their necks.

"We are now about to give you, ladies and gentlemen," he went on, "absolutely free of charge, two hours of the most solid, fascinating, instructive, and educational entertainment it has ever been the fortune of any mortal being to experience! Yes, sir, ladies and gentlemen. Entertainment unparalleled and absolutely free of charge!"

Trenholm threw a switch then, and their ancient movie projector flashed a picture of a Martian dancing girl on the three-dimensional screen, while the braying of one of the latest dance tunes came from the loudspeaker. Most of the music had been produced by the new electric trumpets and trombones, with shrill overtones that were guaranteed to deafen a sensitive ear. The Saturnians watched and listened as if spellbound. O'Hara stared at the pink necklaces, and whispered:

"Trenholm, my lad, we've got a fortune in our hands!"

TRENHOLM nodded. He was a large man, blond, something like an ancient Viking in appearance, but with no trace of Viking recklessness. Recklessness wouldn't have paid. These Saturnians were twelve feet tall, with muscles even out of proportion to their size, and an Earth man compared to them had no more than the strength of a child.

O'Hara was small and dark, with a volubility that contrasted with Trenholm's tendency to silence. And at the moment, he was excited, very excited.

Attracted by the noise of the music, more Saturnians were flocking to the

ship. O'Hara almost went crazy trying to estimate the value of those necklaces. They were made of satar-gyrite, which was mostly silver sulphide, but they contained appreciable quantities of Element 102.

Element 102 was the only known source of atomic energy whose transformation was capable of being accelerated or retarded at will, and the price for it was high, extremely so. But getting it was a very dangerous business. The Saturnians, being below par mentally, were protected by stringent laws. If Trenholm and O'Hara were caught at their little game, the penalty would be at least ten years in a jail that boasted no air conditioning, no television movies, and which guaranteed to teach wayward men the error of their ways.

The reel showing the Martian dancing girl came to an end, and Trenholm slipped on another that depicted a Mercurian minstrel show. The jokes and gags were so babyish that a ten-year-old Earth child would have flushed with shame to be caught listening to them, but they suited the Saturnian taste perfectly, and gales of laughter swept the crowd.

O'Hara did a little mental calculating then. Judging from the mass of people collected here, they would get rid of their radio-active herb remedy in three days. From advance information they had secured, they could reasonably count on a Saturnian patrol ship being back on the fourth day. That gave them a whole day to spare. O'Hara grinned, and almost felt the untold wealth in his pocket.

The Mercurian minstrels wheezed to an end, and O'Hara stepped forward with his right hand raised for attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he roared, "we offer you now an attraction so sensational, so unbelievable, that you will think your eyes and ears are playing you false. Nothing like it has been seen or heard of on Saturn from the beginning of time. Nothing like it has been seen or heard of on any of the planets. Ladies and gentlemen, we offer Waloo, the Saturnian with the intelligence of an Earthman!"

Waloo stepped forward, grinning

with pride. He seemed like an average Saturnian, and he was exactly that. They had picked Waloo up stranded on Mercury, and he had shown no wisdom there. But now he was wearing a pair of huge spectacles whose rims were caught around his flapping ears. And to the other Saturnians he must have looked as wise as a judge.

"Waloo," said O'Hara gravely, "how much is two plus two?"

WALOO hesitated.

"Four," he ventured after a while.

The crowd began to whisper excitedly. Evidently they were checking up. After a few seconds, however, most of them were convinced that Waloo's answer was correct, and they stared at him admiringly.

"How much is four times six?" O'Hara asked.

"Twenty-four," Waloo guessed.

"How much is ninety-nine divided by three?"

"Seventeen," replied Waloo, grinning stupidly, and O'Hara smothered an oath and swept on to the next question before the Saturnians could make up their minds whether or not he had made a mistake.

For a time Waloo answered correctly. And then O'Hara played his trump card.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried. "You have all heard of the Einstein theory. It is so difficult to understand that few people, even on Earth, know what it is. But Waloo knows! Waloo, explain the Einstein theory."

Waloo began slowly.

"In ordinary mechanics," he intoned, "if a body moves with the velocity 'u' with reference to 'O,' and 'O' itself moves with velocity 'v' with reference to 'O'—"

They were stricken with awe. They hadn't the slightest suspicion of what it all meant, of course. For that matter, neither had Trenholm and O'Hara. Trenholm had simply taken the words from a long-outmoded textbook on physics, and copied them for Waloo's benefit on a small placard.

The placard was hung on the wall of the space ship, where to the near-

sighted Saturnians it was practically invisible. But Waloo, with his spectacles, could read the words with ease, just as he had read the answers to the questions O'Hara had asked him. They were spelled in the new interplanetary phonetic manner, and even a Saturnian could pronounce them, no matter how ignorant he might be of their meaning. The whole difficulty with Waloo had been in teaching him to reply to the questions in order, and not to skip on to the next question's answer before the previous one had been given, as he repeatedly did.

Waloo came to the end of the Einstein theory, and there was a burst of spontaneous applause. Waloo flushed happily.

"The damn fool must really think he knows what he's talking about," O'Hara thought, and then addressed the crowd again.

"My friends, you have seen and heard this remarkable exhibition. Would you ever have expected such intelligence from a Saturnian? Would you not have called it impossible? Well you, too, can be as intelligent as Waloo. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, incredible as it may seem, we can increase your intelligence a thousand-fold! Just drink one bottle of genuine Red Man's Old-Fashioned Radio-active Herb Remedy with vitamins A to R every day for five days, and you will be able to answer all the questions Waloo has answered.

"This intelligence remedy, discovered by an old Indian with one-fourth Martian blood in Oklahoma, U.S.A., Earth, while digging for roots, has a record of one hundred percent success! It is radio-active, as you can see when I bring a bottle close to this electroscope. It has all the vitamins in the world, and it contains that magic element, carbon isotope seventeen-B the form of carbon responsible for the genius of our greatest thinkers. Results guaranteed, or your money back."

O'HARA had them going, and he knew it. Stupid as they were, the Saturnians differed from other stupid people, in that they were aware of their deficiency. They had a tremendous respect for intelligence, and

learning, and would do anything to improve their minds. O'Hara did not tell them that on Earth, the same Radio-active Herb Remedy, consisting of little more than a trace of chemical and some colored water, had been advertised as a purifier of the blood stream and a cure for various disease. On Mercury they had guaranteed it to increase the strength of the muscles. The remedy had an unpleasant taste, and that made people believe in it. And for occasional doubters, he and Trenholm could refer to that Martian doctor who had written a crazy article solemnly asserting that they could improve the intelligence.

Sometimes O'Hara could not help grinning when he realized that despite all advances in science, people had the same old weaknesses and desires, and fell for the same old tricks.

"Results guaranteed, or your money back!" he repeated.

"The price, you idiot, the price!" Trenholm whispered. "Tell them the price!" O'Hara had a tendency to become intoxicated with his own words.

"And what do we charge for our magic Radio-active Herb Remedy?" declaimed O'Hara. "Not one thousand Interplanetary Lead Standard dollars, which it is well worth, ladies and gentlemen, which it is well worth. Not one hundred dollars. Not even ten dollars! No, all we ask for five bottles of this wonderful brain stimulator is one small necklace of pink beads.

"Think of it, just one small necklace of worthless pink beads for five bottles! And as an extra added bonus, to the first ten purchasers buying this wonderful Radio-active Herb Remedy with all the vitamins, we intend to give away, absolutely free of charge, one pair of beautiful, hand-made, guaranteed plastic spectacles that will make you look as intelligent as you are going to be!"

If the Saturnians had been impatient to buy the remedy before, the offer of the spectacles stampeded them. They pressed forward in so dense a mass that O'Hara was forced to plead with them.

"Just a moment, ladies and gentle-

men, just a moment!" he boomed. "There is enough of the Radio-active Herb Remedy for all. And my brother and partner, Mr. Jones, authorizes me to state that our offer of spectacles to the first ten purchasers will be extended to every purchaser!"

It was an hour before the buying spree had ended and the last Saturnian had gone, his five bottles of Radio-active Herb Remedy clutched firmly to his breast, and his spectacles with their lenses of plain, green-tinted translucite suspended from his ears. O'Hara was dancing around the ship.

"Almost half the stock gone!" he gloated, fondling the necklaces. "Trenholm, one more evening like this, and we're getting out of this place. We'll have enough to be rich!"

TRENHOLM was more restrained. "Tomorrow's haul won't be as good as this one," he warned. "We got the cream of the crop tonight."

"If only I had thought to take more bottles," O'Hara groaned. He looked around the ship. "Where's Waloo?" he asked suddenly.

Waloo was gone.

"He's out there in the open country," observed Trenholm. "We'll have to go after him."

O'Hara nodded, and went into the ship. He returned with a small round metal object in his hand.

"For the stinger prongs," he explained, and they set out.

Overhead the rings of Saturn cast a faint, reflecting light, and they could see without using their electric rays. The countryside had an eerie appearance in the semi-darkness. The plants were pyramidal in shape, rising from a broad base, and coming almost to a point, so that they might conserve their heat against the freezing temperatures that would come during the long night. They were almost all dark red and brown in color, and there was no touch of green to relieve the ugly monotony.

Trenholm and O'Hara remained at first on a well-traveled path. Then, from far off to the right, came the whinnying of a megapod. They stopped suddenly.

"That's probably it," said Trenholm.

"Waloo heard it, and set out to capture it."

They turned off the path to the right. A small glowing helix came twisting slowly past them, shedding a lurid violet light, and they gave it a wide berth. When excited, the helix had been known to wrap itself with incredible speed around a man's arm or leg, and squeeze. There was terrific force in the luminescent coils, and the usual result was that the arm or leg fell off, the stump cauterized by the radiation as neatly as if done by a surgeon's electrodes.

In the distance they saw a megapod bound into the air, and come sailing down again slowly. Then they heard a low whistle. That was undoubtedly Waloo.

The Saturnian was no more than a few hundred feet from them, and if they were lucky they would see him in less than five minutes. As they made their way forward, however, a sudden shadow fell on them. They stopped again and looked up.

Apparently descending from a spot in one of Saturn's rings, far to the left of them, a cloud of what seemed to be dust was tracing a parabolic path in the air.

"I guess that's it," O'Hara said, and grasped the small metal object he had taken from the ship more tightly. "Suppose we put our backs to one of those plants?" he suggested.

Trenholm shook his head.

"The prongs might slide down its sides," he pointed out. "We'd better stay as far out in the open as we can. Save the energy in that projector."

The particles of dust came closer, so that they seemed like small black spheres. Then, while still high up, the spheres disintegrated, and there were a thousand particles for each one that had existed before. They fell less rapidly now, having encountered the resistance of the Saturnian air. But they fell nevertheless, and when apparently only a mile up, the new particles, themselves grown to black spheres, disintegrated in turn.

"Do they split again?" asked O'Hara.

"No. They're individual stinger animals now."

AS the animals drifted down, the Earthmen could make out their outlines. Each black leathery balloon was almost two feet in diameter. There was no appearance of eyes or any other features. Behind each balloon were three large purple streamers several yards in length.

It was these streamers, arranged like the prongs of a fork, that had given the animals their name, and it was in them that the danger lay. A single touch of their purple fronds would incapacitate a Saturnian, or kill an Earthman.

The prongs were coming closer now, seeming to fill the whole sky.

"Turn on the projector," Trenholm said.

O'Hara pressed a button, and held the projector over his head. They could see very little, for the prongs blotted out most of the light, and the projector's radiation was ultra-violet. But they knew the projector was working, for above them a prong suddenly came within range, and exploded!

The ultra-violet light had struck the black balloon, and both the leathery substance and the purple streamers had dissolved into gas. O'Hara could smell a faint odor of sulfur compounds.

The prongs began to explode rapidly now, and for a moment the space above them became clear. But other prongs came drifting in from all sides, and O'Hara could not let up for a second. When he tired, Trenholm took the projector from him, and directed it against the silent throng of invaders.

A prong came within ten feet of them without exploding, and O'Hara tore it to pieces with a shot from his electric gun.

"The radiation is getting weak now," Trenholm snapped. "If they keep coming—"

A faint wind had sprung up suddenly, and all the prongs began to drift toward the left.

"It'll drive them away," exclaimed O'Hara happily. "All we have to do is wait."

The wind freshened, and within a minute it rose to hurricane intensity.

And after that the rain hit them.

Most of the prongs had drifted far enough away to be no longer dangerous, and the rest were disintegrating in the rain. The raindrops were enormous, at least three inches in diameter, and they came down with many times the force of any hailstones. Trenholm and O'Hara had ever seen on earth.

They fell without breaking up into smaller drops because they were not pure water, but a viscous aqueous solution. The force of the wind had whirled them up from a lake where they had been resting quietly, and was now hurling them at Trenholm and O'Hara.

The two men cast themselves on the ground in the lee of a tetraphyte, one of the huge pyramidal plants, and waited for the storm to pass. The drops of rain hit them and splattered, and the droplets rolled down their faces so that they could taste them. They were bitter and nauseous, and their taste was almost worse than the battering they were receiving from the rain.

In ten minutes, the wind ceased suddenly, and with it the rain. The two men rose to their feet painfully, and squeezed as much of the liquid as they could out of their clothes. Ahead of them, the megapod sprang into the air a second time, and once more they could hear Waloo whistling to the animal enticingly.

THEY started forward again. Soon they could see the megapod clearly. At first glance it looked like nothing more than four huge mustard-colored legs, grotesquely held together at the top by an insignificant body. On each leg was a pair of wings, kept folded when the animal sprang upward, extended as soon as the highest point in the leap had been reached, thus permitting a gradual descent.

The wings were useful also during a high wind, for then the animal could soar, and travel long distances without effort. The legs were jointed, and the forelegs were twice as long as the others, so that on the ground the megapod had difficulty keeping its balance. But it occasionally made use

of a stiff tail that acted as an additional support. The head was round and tiny, and hardly seemed fitted for a beast of sufficient size to carry a Saturnian.

Waloo was holding something green out to it. As Trenholm and O'Hara came closer, they recognized the material as the roots of a rare variety of tetraphyte that was growing all about them. At the same time that Waloo was trying to lure the megapod nearer to him, he whistled coaxingly.

The megapod stared at Waloo, its tiny eyes showing its indecision. Finally it leaped forward, and nibbled the green roots. Waloo did not move, and the megapod, encouraged, began to eat steadily.

"It's wild, isn't it?" O'Hara asked, low-voiced.

"Wild, but not ownerless," Trenholm said. "This field we're in belongs to a group of Saturnians."

"Then if Waloo is caught—"

"It's jail for him."

O'Hara frowned.

"What about us?"

"The Saturnians will probably make enough noise for someone to send for the patrol," Trenholm replied. "You know what the patrol will do to us. Jail, and reconditioning of our evil way."

"Don't you think we ought to get out of here?" O'Hara exclaimed.

"We need Waloo for a couple of evenings yet," Trenholm stiffened suddenly. "Something's happening to the beast!"

The megapod had fallen asleep on its feet. With its tail jammed against the ground to keep itself from falling, and its eyes closed, it resembled a piece of sculpture. The green roots had contained a drug called somnal, and it had acted with great speed.

Waloo had drawn several pieces of thin, metal twine from his pocket, and was carefully tying the megapod's wings, to prevent them from unfolding.

"Where did the Saturnians ever get the brains to handle these animals?" O'Hara wondered.

"They didn't," answered Trenholm. "This method of capture was devised

by a Martian and taught to them. Watch."

The wings had all been tied, and Waloo carefully mounted the animal's back, his feet wrapping closely around it. Then he cautiously bit one of the vertebrae just below the megapod's neck. With one startled spring, his steed was leaping high in the air.

WITHOUT the wings to retard its descent, the megapod came down again as quickly as it had gone up, and landed with a shock that sent a tremor through its body. His legs wrapped firmly about it, Waloo held on. The megapod leaped again.

This time, with the pain of the descent, it staggered and almost fell. The next leap was not so high, and the following one still lower. Within a few minutes the megapod had become so bruised that it refused to spring. Then Waloo carefully untied the hind wings, and bit the megapod's neck again. The megapod leaped, and on the descent, spread its two free wings. The shock was not so severe now.

In half an hour, Waloo had reached the stage where he dared untie all the wings. The megapod no longer attempted to throw him off its back, and Trenholm and O'Hara watched in fascination as the animal and its rider went floating about the field.

A sudden crunching sound on the ground nearby drew the Earthmen's attention. A Saturnian was approaching, his eyes fixed on Waloo. His face showed an expression of deep anger.

"We'd better warn the damn fool," O'Hara whispered to his partner.

Waloo was unconscious of the danger. Then the Saturnian bellowed suddenly in a voice that sounded like the roar of a hundred bulls, and from behind him came an answering bellow. The megapod, startled, leaped into the air, and, spreading his wings, turned upside down. Waloo began to slip off, clutching desperately at the animal's back to keep his balance. But his efforts were in vain. As he fell, the megapod turned right side up, hit the ground again, and bounded away.

"What do we do now?" O'Hara demanded.

"We run," Trenholm said. "Somebody is sure to send for the patrol. We can't afford to wait for it."

"But Waloo—"

"The worst he'll get is a month or two. They'd give us ten years and recondition us. Do you want that?"

"But we've still got some unsold bottles!"

"We've taken in enough satargyrite to be sitting pretty the rest of our lives. Come on!"

Waloo was lying where he had fallen, stunned. They ran without looking back toward him. At first the noise of the Saturnians behind them died away, but as they approached the space ship, it suddenly grew in intensity once more.

Waloo was coming after them in great twenty-foot strides. Behind him, the pack of Saturnians was howling their heads off, calling on him to stop. Waloo paid them as much attention as if they hadn't existed.

A hundred yards from the ship, he passed O'Hara and Trenholm, who had to swerve aside to prevent being run over by his hurtling body. He got to the ship five seconds ahead of them, and slammed the door in their faces.

"What do we do now?" O'Hara cried. "If they decide to make up for losing Waloo by taking it out on us—"

But the Saturnians were not interested in the Earthmen. They wanted Waloo. Through the transparent windows of the space ship, they could see him, the key to the door in his hand.

THEY shouted at him; they cursed him, they urged him to come out and take his medicine like a man. But Waloo didn't budge. Then the Saturnians, in their rage, began to bang against the ship.

"They'll wreck it," O'Hara moaned. "And the patrol will be coming back soon!"

Trenholm was breathing hard.

"The first thing to do," he said, "is to calm down. Take it easy, O'Hara. It'll be a half hour before the patrol gets here, and we've got plenty of time. We've got to calm these Saturnians and get Waloo out of the ship."

"Is that all?" scoffed O'Hara excitedly.

"Take it easy, or I'll smack you right in the teeth. That's better. I've got a plan. You're going to talk to these people. Waloo can hear you through the auditory tube, and whether the rest of them pay much attention to you or not won't matter at first. Give them a regular spiel, and lead up to the introduction of Waloo, the intelligent Saturnian."

O'Hara got it, and smiled slowly. He took a deep breath, and shouted:

"Ladies and gentlemen!"

The hubbub came to a sudden stop.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he went on, "you are about to witness, absolutely free of charge, two hours of the most solid, fascinating, instructive, and educational entertainment it has ever been the fortune of any mortal being to experience. Yes sir, ladies and gentlemen. Entertainment unparalleled, and absolutely free of charge."

There was magic in O'Hara's voice, for they were actually listening to him. They muttered, but they listened.

"And to begin with," orated O'Hara, "we offer you an attraction so sensational, so unbelievable, that you will think your eyes and ears are playing you false. Nothing like it has been seen or heard of on Saturn since the beginning of time. Nothing like it has been seen or heard of on any of the planets. Ladies and gentlemen, we offer Waloo, the Saturnian with the intelligence of an Earthman!"

And Waloo, hypnotized by the familiar introduction, opened the door of the ship and stepped out, his spectacles hanging from his ears!

The mob of Saturnians uttered one huge roar of triumph, and plunged forward, carrying Waloo back into the ship. Trenholm and O'Hara stood by shouting helplessly.

It was ten minutes before the Saturnians thought of getting out again, and when they did, they carried the unconscious Waloo as a trophy of victory. For the next couple of months, Waloo would inhabit a cell.

O'Hara and Trenholm hastened inside. At first glance, the place was a

shambles, but the machinery had not been damaged.

They swung shut the door, locked the auditory tube, and started the engine.

"Ready?" Trenholm asked, and without waiting for a reply, gave the ship the gun with a jerk that sent O'Hara flying.

THE ship rose quickly, passed the rings of Saturn, and straightened out into space in the direction of Earth. O'Hara wiped the sweat from his forehead. Through the rear windows they could see the patrol ship coasting in to make a landing.

"That was close," O'Hara panted. "I only hope they don't try to follow us."

"I'll take them a half hour to find out from the Saturnians what's been going on, and by then it'll be too late."

"If you knew how glad I am to get out of that place—" O'Hara began, and then he howled. "The bottles! The bottles!"

"What about them?" Trenholm demanded.

"They're gone! Those Saturnians have stolen all our Radio-active Herb Remedy! There's just one bottle left. And you claimed they were honest!"

"They are, but they have no sense. If they see something in front of them, they take it."

"The dumb clucks." And then O'Hara's voice froze with real horror. "They've taken the pink necklaces! And we hid them!"

"What!" Trenholm gasped.

"Every last one of them!" O'Hara trembled. "We've made a mistake, Trenholm. Those Saturnians aren't stupid!"

Trenholm looked. O'Hara was right. Every last necklace was gone.

"This is a dishonest business," Trenholm said heavily. "We should never have gone into it. But I don't understand—" He interrupted himself. "Well, I'll be damned!"

"What is it now?"

"That damn herb remedy! Remember what first gave us the idea of an intelligence improver? That article we read about an infusion of Martian plants containing the new carbon iso-

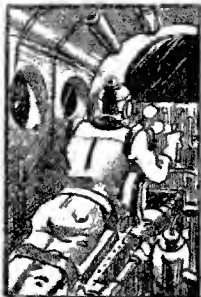
tope temporarily increasing the I. Q. Well, we used those plants to make our stuff. O'Hara, we actually made those Saturnians intelligent enough to rob us!"

"This is a fine time to be thinking of that!" stormed O'Hara.

"Calm down," Trenholm urged, "and have a drink."

"At a time like this, it's a drink you're offering me!"

"Our last bottle of Red Man's Old-Fashioned Radio-active Herb Remedy. There's nothing better for stimulating the brain. I'm thinking we have greater need of it than those formerly dumb clucks we left behind us," Trenholm added gloomily.



HEADLINERS IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE three men aboard the space ship stared through the transparent wall of the observation room. They stared out into the blackness of space, searched intently—for a world that wasn't there.

"I can't understand it," muttered one of the three men. "This is the correct Solar System, according to our calculations. The planet Earth should be over there"—he pointed with a finger into the blackness below—"but it isn't. It's gone!"

"Yes—gone!" echoed one of the man's companions. "It's lost—lost somewhere in the Universe!"

You'll want to join in the cosmic quest for a missing world in Barry Cord's sensational sciencification novel, **THE LOST PLANET**. Here's a story of star-rovers of the future that you will proclaim as the interplanetary classic of 1941. Written by a newcomer to **THRILLING WONDER STORIES**, you'll welcome Barry Cord into your fold of fantasy favorites. **THE LOST PLANET** is published complete in the March issue, illustrated profusely by Wesso!

* * * * *

HE was Spaceman Number 1, and his rocket craft was the first to land on an alien world. His simple exhibitions of science amazed the inhabitants. They called him a miracle man—for was he not a stranger from the stars?

Here's a star-spangled novelet of a mortal who could have had the power and the glory, but chose to return to his native planet. **Fred-eric Arnold Kummer, Jr.**, tells you more about

him in **STRANGER FROM THE STARS**, in the next issue, a novelet of wonder.

* * * * *

IT hovered up among the clouds, a whirling, baffling entity of evil. It destroyed everything in its path—but nothing could destroy it! Military strategists called upon the powers of science to help annihilate this spinning Nemesis in the sky—but the gyrating foe was invulnerable.

And then one man had the answer. The creature had to destroy itself! **Robert Arthur** tells you how in **THE INDESTRUCTIBLE**, featured in the next issue.

* * * * *

A **ROCKET** race in the stratosphere, between the racers of the future! Danger and a cargo of thrills aboard this light-year-a-second drama of the speedsters of tomorrow. **Captain Paul Jones** thought he could win—but he had to race against a haunting memory—a memory that came **OUT OF THE YEARS**. Written by **Ivan Sandorf**, another newcomer to **T.W.S.**, **OUT OF THE YEARS** is an exciting novelet packed with a cyclotron of surprises.

* * * * *

OTH**ER** outstanding stories by popular fantasy writers in the March issue of **THRILLING WONDER STORIES**. And our regular star-parade of exclusive fact features. **SCIENTIFACTS**, **LOOKING FORWARD**, and others. And trail along on **Sergeant Saturn's** stellar orbit as he blasts off from Earth to Pluto in **THE READER SPEAKS**, the brightest readers' department in sciencification! And remember—**T.W.S.** is the only monthly magazine with a long complete novel in every issue!

HERCULES MUSCLES IN

By **KELVIN KENT**

Author of "Knight Must Fall," "A Comedy of Eras," etc.

When the Strong Man of Peloponnesos Finds Himself in a Labor Daze, Year-Leaper Pete Proves That a Brain and Brawn Trust Is Mightier Than Zeus!

CHAPTER I

Back to 700 B.C.

PETE MANX rubbed his bullet head reflectively, put the derby back upon it, and glanced at his companion in the taxicab.



Pete Manx

"You just don't understand, Biggie," he said wearily. "Lots of guys have the same trouble."

Mr. Bigpig Callahan, one-time bronco-wrangler and currently a wrestler both owned and managed by Pete, looked glum. Or, at least, one supposed he did. It is difficult to detect emotion in a face like a slab of beef, slashed by a lipless gap, dotted by two tiny, glittering eyes, and fringed with bristling red hair and a couple of scalloped objects that were probably ears.

Bigpig's face had not always been thus. Raised in New York's East Side, he had brawled his way from Jersey to Montana, remaining in the latter place for six years learning how to punch cattle. Pete had a well-founded idea that a cow had once stepped on Bigpig's uncomely face, a process scarcely calculated to improve on nature. At any rate, it was neither a thing of beauty nor a joy forever.

"Flors," said Mr. Callahan. "Dey git me."

Pete translated mentally. Roses, petunias, or tulips to Bigpig came under the classification of flors. But it was only goldenrod that was poison.

"You're allergic to the things," Pete pointed out. "See? It's like having hayfever."

"Alloigic, huh? Izzat good or bad?"

"It's bad. And we get out here. The Doc'll fix you up. He's a smart fella.

A Complete Pete Manx Novelet



The nobles, who heretofore had preferred their own private, horse-drawn chariots, now flocked to Manx's Ultra Limousine Service

He found out I was alloi—allergic to time traveling."

But this was utterly beyond Bigpig's comprehension. He could never have understood the principles of Mayhem's device that had more than once projected Pete Manx back into historical eras and long-past centuries. Once Pete's consciousness had been sent back to Rome to inhabit the body of a citizen of that interesting city; once he had visited Egypt.

But those days were gone forever for Pete. Every time he had visited an ancient time-sector, he had got into trouble. Right now he was sitting pretty, or had been till lately. He'd given up his job as concessionaire at Coney Island, and instead was managing Bigpig Callahan, Mammoth of the Mat. And Bigpig was good—there was no doubt about that.

Built like an ox to begin with, his years of wrangling on the range had developed lightning-quick reactions in what Pete hopefully called his brain. The mauler had only two serious faults. He had fallen arches. On another man that might be unimportant, but Bigpig's arches reminded Pete vaguely of the Brooklyn Bridge. His other really dangerous weakness was his allergy.

Doctor Horatio Mayhem's scrawny figure appeared in the door in response to a ring. The scientist's mild eyes blinked at the callers.

"Ah. Hello, Pete," he greeted. "Come in."

THEY were ushered into Mayhem's laboratory, where wires, rheostats, converters, generators, and tubes made a baffling jigsaw puzzle. Two metal chairs, looking rather deadly, stood in the corner. Pete averted his gaze. He had sat in those chairs more than once, and each time he had been flung back into past centuries. They were part of Mayhem's time machine, that released the ego of the individual and sent it out to possess the body of some inhabitant of an ancient time-sector.

"This," said Pete, "is Bigpig Callahan." Swiftly he explained the situation, while Bigpig shifted unhappily from one foot to another.

"So we had a scrap scheduled for last night, Doc. And it was all fixed,

only Biggie ran into some goldenrod in a florist's shop. He swelled up fit to bust and we forfeited the purse. He couldn't fight. He couldn't even talk."

"Allergy, eh?" Mayhem asked.

"Yeah. The Purple Python was a set-up for Biggie—but he lost the purse. It was winner take all."

"I'da moidered da bum," Mr. Callahan remarked at random. "I'da thrown him outa da ring."

"Sure," Pete soothed his fighter. "Just relax, Biggie. Don't bother us." Bigpig wandered away in a vague manner, while Mayhem and Manx went on talking.

"Some people are allergic to goldenrod pollen, of course," the doctor nodded. "But—"

"It hits Bigpig bad. His throat swells up so he can hardly breathe. Now look, Doc, you're smart. Can you cure Biggie so he won't be allergic any more?"

Instead of answering, Mayhem yelped sharply. He sprang forward, making frantic gestures.

"Stop! Don't do that! The current's turned on—"

"My feet hoit," explained Bigpig, and sank down in one of the metal chairs.

ELECTRICITY crackled. Mr. Callahan looked surprised, and then an expression of utter calm flooded his face. He ceased to breathe, and relaxed, to all appearances a large, uncomely, and repugnant corpse.

"Biggie!" Pete cried desperately. "Look out!"

Mayhem shut off the current, but he was too late. Bigpig Callahan was no longer among those present. Pete Manx clawed at the wrestler's shoulder.

"Wake up, you bird-brained dope! You can't do this to me! It ain't legal—"

The scientist drew Pete back.

"He isn't dead. He's just been sent into a past era."

"Oh . . . oh, yeah. That's right. Well, what are we waiting for? Bring him back, Doc, will you?"

Mayhem hesitated.

"I'm afraid I can't, just yet. I was making some adjustments on my machine, and I'd dismantled part of the apparatus. The device only works one

way now. Never mind, though," the doctor consoled. "I'll be able to wake your friend up in a week or so, maybe."

Pete writhed in anguish. "Where is he now?"

"Um—let's see." Mayhem referred to various gauges. "Beyond 700 B. C. Maybe 800 B. C."

"Huh," said Pete unhappily. "Back to the dinosaurs, huh?"

"Oh, no. Ancient Greece—Peloponnesos—is where he's gone, I think. There was a culture there, you know."

Pete went off on a tangent.

"That dumb ox! All my dough tied up in him, and he goes visiting Greeks. He'll get in trouble. He's too dopey to keep out of it." A great inward struggle seemed to be taking place within Mr. Manx's soul, but at last virtue triumphed. "Doc!" Pete said suddenly. "I gotta look after that monkey. I know how this time racket works. Can you send me back to Greece too?"

Mayhem nodded.

"Yes. But I can't return you to our present time-sector for some time, until I've finished my repairs—"

"I'll get along. I can take care of myself—but Biggie can't. Okay. Shoot the works, Doc." And Pete seated himself in the second of the two chairs.

Mayhem went to the instrument board and pulled a lever. Pete was surprised to discover that it was the Fourth of July. His head had become a Roman candle.

Sssss—swish!

Pete Manx stopped breathing and relaxed. He was on his way to 700 B. C.!

CHAPTER II

Strong Man Fills Strong-Box

PETE opened his eyes to sunlight and a face. The face was unprepossessing, decorated with a bristling black beard and an assortment of scars. The man was wearing armor, and a plume waved from his bronze helmet.

He leaned over Pete and jabbed the prostrate man in the stomach with a spear.

"Hey!" said Mr. Manx. "Don't do

that. It ain't friendly."

"No runaway slave can make a fool out of one of the King's Guard," the soldier growled, and used the spear again. Pete scrambled hurriedly to his feet, staring around.

He was in the midst of a fairly big city. This was seemingly the main stem, for a number of chariots were rolling past, filled with people heading for a masquerade. They wore an assortment of tunics, togas, pillow-slips, and armor, or so it seemed to Pete. He yelped and dodged the spear.

"Slave?" Pete said aggrievedly.

"Where in Hellene am I?"

"In the city of Tiryns, of course, in the Peloponnesos, as if you didn't know," said the soldier. "And I was taking you to the king for judgment when you pretended sunstroke and fell down. Come along!"

Pete obeyed. There was nothing else he could do. He was, he decided, talking Greek, for his memory-center connected with speech had automatically hitched itself to the brain of the body he was inhabiting. Mayhem had once explained all this very carefully. The miserable luck that pursued Manx whenever he took a time tour had struck again. So he was a runaway slave this time. Pete swore softly at his ill fate. Glancing down, he suppressed a shout, a short, sharp cry of dismay. He seemed to be clad only in an inadequate pillow-slip.

"Oh-oh," Pete murmured. "First thing I gotta find myself a pair of pants—"

Haled through Tiryns at the point of a spear, he found himself wondering about Bigpig Callahan. He had not the slightest idea what Biggie would look like in his Hellenic incarnation.

They reached the palace. It was a dump, compared to the White House, Pete thought. They entered, presently finding themselves in the throne room, a big, chilly place with a raised dais at one end. It was filled with a motley throng, but Pete's eyes were riveted to the throne and the man who sat upon it.

The king was a husky old man with a long gray beard and a vicious gleam in his eye. Beside him stood a dapper, handsome officer in gilded armor, who

occasionally leaned forward to whisper in the ruler's ear.

Before the dais stood a very giant of a man—a brawny figure clad in a dilapidated lion skin and nothing else. Mild blue eyes searched the room in a dazed manner.

Pete's captor dragged him into a corner. "We'll have to wait," he muttered. "Hercules is in trouble again, and I'll wager Nessus is responsible."

"Huh?" The guard turned away, scowling, but a friendlier soldier nearby answered Pete. "Nessus is the officer standing beside the throne. He used to be the city's chief hero, till Hercules came. But nobody looks at him now."

The name of the man in the lion-skin was vaguely familiar.

"Hercules, eh?" Pete said. "What's his racket?"

ANIMATION showed in the other's face.

"You must be a stranger, not to know of Hercules. He's under bond to the throne, and King Eurystheus makes him do dirty jobs like cleaning the stables, but Hercules is a hero indeed. He killed Geryon—a human monster with three bodies—and brought his herd of red cattle to the king. And he slew the lion of Nemea—that's the skin he's wearing."

"A Frank Buck, huh?"

"I know not the name. He captured the man-eating horses of Diomedes, too. They're penned up now, of course, and malefactors are fed to them. Eurystheus doesn't like Hercules; he's afraid of his growing popularity with the people. But he doesn't dare kill him outright. He just gives him harder and harder tasks to perform."

Nessus bent toward the king and whispered again. Eurystheus smiled and stroked his beard. He stared at Hercules.

"It has come to our knowledge," the king rumbled, "that you struck a costermonger and dislocated his jaw. What was his offense?"

"Gosh," Hercules said, plaintively, "he stepped on my corns. He was tryin' to sell me some goldenrod an' I can't stand the stuff. An' he wouldn't go away. I don't get this set-up, anyway—"

"Yipee!" The involuntary cry burst from Pete's lips. The guard made a frantic clutch as his captive sprang forward. A spear whizzed past Mr. Manx's head, and a soldier shouted, "An assassin! Slay him!"

But Pete wasn't heading toward the king. He was embracing Hercules.

"Biggie! It's you!" Pete gurgled at the lion-skinned man.

"Hey—you sound like Pete!" Hercules said. "What's a idea of this whacky get-up, anyhow? What—"

Pete scrambled to safety behind the hero's brawny legs as a soldier approached, waving a spear. But King Eurystheus lifted a hand.

"A friend of yours, Hercules? Who is this helot?"

"Manx is the name, your honor—"

"Silence!" Pete's guard bellowed. He bowed low before the king. "A runaway slave, your majesty. I caught him and brought him back for judgment."

"I see." Eurystheus scabbled in his beard. "Well, throw him to the man-eating horses. We can't have such goings-on in Tiryns. It's bad enough with the imperial treasury running at a deficit and the people objecting to our taxes, without slaves getting above themselves. To the man-eaters with him."

Two soldiers grabbed Pete, who clung frantically to Bigpig's pillarlike legs.

"Make 'em go 'way," Manx babbled. "Soak 'em, Biggie—quick!"

Mr. Callahan hesitated, scratched his head thoughtfully, and then swung immense arms. The soldiers described an irregular orbit across the room, ending up by folding around an impassive pillar. They slid down gently to the floor.

"Sedition!" Nessus cried, his thin, handsome face alight with malice. "Slay them both!"

"Hey, wait a minute," Biggie roared, suddenly getting the idea. "Pete's a pal of mine. You can't push him around."

There was a silence. Eurystheus leaned toward Nessus.

"I can't order Hercules killed," he whispered. "The people won't stand for it."

"Well, kill the slave," said Nessus, with what Pete thought an unnecessary enthusiasm.

But Biggie folded his arms and scowled.

"Pete's my pal. If anybody lays a finger on him—"

THERE was a silence. It was a deadlock, and no one realized this as well as Mr. Manx. From his experience with kings and Pharaohs, he knew how important it was for regents to keep face, and his mind was working furiously in an attempt to find an out. Maybe there was a way—

"Now wait a minute, your majesty," he said, gulping. "I got an idea we can settle this out of court. You said the treasury was running in the red. Suppose I show you a way to clean up plenty—"

"Kill him!" Nessus snapped, but the king leaned forward interestedly.

"Eh? Are you talking about—"

"Money," Pete said enticingly. "Gold. Dinero. The long green."

Eurystheus shushed Nessus with a lifted hand.

"He may know where some treasure is hidden. Come forward, slave. I shall hear from you."

Pete glanced around.

"This has gotta be a private audience. Just you and me and—uh—Hercules here."

There was a little wrangle about this, but presently the courtroom was cleared. Nessus, however, remained, glaring at Pete and Hercules with vicious eyes.

"Now," said Eurystheus, "speak up, or my torturers will make you. Where is this treasure buried?"

By this time Pete had had time to consider possible angles. Somehow his mind had gone blank. What Tiryns needed was some up-to-date racket that would pay dividends—but what? Not knowing much about the culture and life of the Hellenic city, it was impossible to say. Pete cast back to what he had seen during his progress toward the palace. Chariots. . . .

"Who owns all these two-wheel japolies around here?" he asked.

"Don't change the subject," the king growled. "About this treasure—"

"It's on the main stem, just waiting to be picked up," Pete said hurriedly. "Your transportation system's lousy. No subways, no El's, no buses. It'd be tough to make those here in Tiryns, sure, but you've got a ready-made business here with these chariots. It's too hot to walk. What Tiryns needs are taxis. . . ."

It took an hour to explain the situation to Eurystheus, but Pete's glib tongue finally convinced the king.

"But I gotta get something out of it, King," he argued. "I'll fix up the whole business for you—take care of all the angles—but you gotta give me a franchise on the main stem. Only my cabs can run there. No competition. We can keep the fares up that way."

"A franchise?" The king pondered. "Well, you say you'll give me fifty per cent of all the profits. How long will this arrangement keep up?"

Nessus whispered in the royal ear. Eurystheus smiled and turned to Hercules.

"You vouch for this slave? Good. Then he is safe for your lifetime, Hercules. We are merciful. The franchise is valid as long as you live."

And, despite Pete's objections, so it was arranged.

WHEN Manx started something, he finished it. He got a money-lender to put up a small amount of gold, with Hercules' famous lion-skin as security, and with this as a basis, took an option on a few dozen cheap chariots. Creating taximeters was not too great a problem, once Pete understood the monetary exchange of the city. Cogged gears, connected with the chariot wheels, caused various dials to revolve, indicating the fare.

"You gotta put on a front," Pete explained to the wide-eyed Biggie. "Help me splash on some of this gilt paint." It wasn't long before the chariots were finished. Nobody would have recognized them.

They gleamed like gold, and had striped awnings to protect the occupants from the heat of the sun. On the backs were stenciled glaring red signs:

PETROS MANKOS CABS

Six Can Ride for the Price of One
Why Walk? Ride in Cool Comfort

Pete had purposely bought small, light chariots, for he saw no reason to incur the expense of purchasing and caring for horses. Instead, it was easy, with a little labor, to transform the conveyances into rickshaws, which could be drawn easily by the drivers themselves.

"It worked at the Fair," Pete mused smugly, "so why not here?"

And it did work! For years the common people had enviously eyed the chariots which they could not afford to own. Now they paid gladly to ride briefly on a level with nobles. The nobles, however, didn't like it. They had a way of driving recklessly into Pete's cabs and overturning them.

Mr. Manx was equal to the occasion. Within a few days a new fleet of cabs made their appearance on the streets of Tiryns. They were purple, with golden spangles, and had bright orange awnings with tassels. Small fans, connected with the turning wheels, helped to keep the riders cool. The fare was double that of the plebian chariots, but these cabs modestly advertised the legend:

ULTRA LIMOUSINE SERVICE

For Those Who Can Afford the Best
Fans and Music Provided

The limousine charioteers were specially picked and trained by Pete. In the absence of radios, he decided to depend on the human voice, and soon the limousine cabs were rolling along merrily, drawn by huskies who yodeled popular songs Pete taught them. "Wagon Wheels," "My Merry Oldsmobile," and "Heigh-Ho" were the favorites, until the charioteers got short of wind and threatened to strike for a ten-song-a-day minimum.

Pete installed a special seat at the back of the cabs, and placed on each one a neatly-uniformed blonde with a zither, who thereafter sang and played while the cabmen devoted their energies to pulling. The nobles, who heretofore had preferred their own private, horse-drawn chariots, now flocked to the Ultra Limousine Service. "Honey draws flies," Pete remarked sagely to Bigpig. "And honeys draw guys. Not bad, eh?"

CHAPTER III

Home on the Range

PETE found no difficulty in renewing the options on the chariots, and more were immediately added. Tiryns was a changed city. By the end of the second week Pete was able to present King Eurystheus with three bags filled with gold. He was, however, distressed to find Nessus closeted with the king, obviously up to no good.

"I don't like that shavetail," he told Biggie—and his fears were justified when the pair were summoned to the palace the next day. Eurystheus showered them with compliments and praised the cut of Hercules' lion skin, which Pete had redeemed out of hock. "A mighty hero," he said tauntingly, glancing at Nessus. "How long has it been since you killed Geryon? A year? You must grow stale here with nothing to do. Suppose you trot off to Elis and clean the Augean stables."

"Suppose he don't?" Pete made the mistake of inquiring.

"Hercules is under bond to me," said the king. "In expiation of various crimes. If he fails to obey me and refuses the tasks I set him, he dies. But the mighty Hercules will obey, I am sure."

"Okay," said Pete, shrugging. "We're in. So we're stable-boys. But don't think I don't get the angle—"

He didn't finish. It wasn't necessary. But, later, he got Nessus aside and proceeded to insult the officer vigorously.

"You put the king up to this, shavetail. My franchise is good as long as Hercules lives, but Eurystheus doesn't like the idea of splitting the take with us. If Hercules just happens to kick the bucket, I lose the franchise—"

"And will be flung to the man-eating horses," Nessus said nastily. "I'll make sure of that, slave."

Pete was feeling none too well when he and Bigpig arrived at the neighboring kingdom of Elis. King Augeias was a huge, fat man with a helpless air of incompetence whenever he ordered people executed, which he did far too

often for Pete's peace of mind. Cleaning the Augean stables was no small task. They hadn't been cleaned for thirty years!

"Well, we'll be finished in thirty years, maybe," said Biggie, staring at the mess. Pete shook his head.

"Won't do. There's a time limit. There's gotta be an out—there always is, if you look hard enough. Though I dunno—"

"Can't you high-pressure the big shot into giving us some help?" Bigpig asked.

"No. We've got to do it ourselves—wait!" Pete's eyes widened. "High-pressure—you said something that time, pal. I got an idea—and what an idea!"

He fled, dragging the bewildered Hercules with him. Pete had remembered that two great rivers—the Alpheios and the Peneios—flowed near the stables, and that higher up the slope was a natural lake. King Augeias was willing to provide Hercules with all the facilities he required, but not with any man-power. So Pete took advantage of the royal offer and laid a pipe-line from the lake down to the stables.

Force of gravity did the rest. When a valve was turned, a jet of water, hard as a bar of iron, thrust itself resistlessly out of the nozzle. It took all of Bigpig's Herculean strength to manipulate the hose, but the gadget worked! A deluge flooded the stables, and, even before Pete expected, the job was finished.

"Quicker than the WPA could have done it," Pete remarked cryptically.

"Thanks," said King Augeias. "Come back in thirty years and do it again, eh?"

KING EURYSTHEUS nibbled his beard and Nessus cursed in vicious monotone when Pete and Hercules returned to Tiryns. The taxicab business was booming. Gold poured into the coffers. Half of it went to the king, but the latter wanted it all. Pete suspected that he was thinking up some even more difficult task for Hercules to perform.

Unexpectedly, trouble came from Bigpig himself. Ill at ease in this alien

time-sector, he kept wandering about, picking fights and getting in jams until Pete was really worried. It was vital that Hercules keep the good will of the people, for that protected him from the king's malice.

"No," Mr. Manx said coldly. "You can't open a beer joint. Ain't the taxicab racket good enough for you?"

"I wisht I was back in Montana," Bigpig mourned. "If I had a cayuse between my legs—"

"Uh! That's an idea. It'll keep you out of trouble, anyway. Listen, Biggie; suppose I help you start a Dude Ranch?"

"Huh?"

"It'll clean up." Pete was rapidly becoming enthusiastic about his own project. "The people'll eat it up. . . ."

Also it would keep Bigpig out of the king's icy eye, but that was not entirely dependable, with Nessus around. Nevertheless the plan went forward. Soon the streets of Tiryns were placarded with large, flaming signs. The chariot-cabs carried them, too.

HERCULES' DUDE RANCH

Mgr., Petros Mankos

Open to the Public on Next Saturn's Day
Big Free Show

Cow-punchers—bulldogging—
bronco-busting

RODEO!

Why go to the beach on your vacation?
Spend a week or two at

HERCULES' DUDE RANCH!

The grand opening was a huge success. Vast mobs attended. Celebrities were brought free to the premiere in the Petros Mankos cabs for the occasion.

They all applauded loudly, and were conquered. Bigpig begged to be allowed to wear a pair of chaps like the other hands, whom he had trained, but Pete was adamant.

"That lion-skin's your trademark," he insisted. "Everybody knows it."

"Heck," said Mr. Callahan. "It smells."

Though this was undeniable, Bigpig knew Pete too well to argue further. As for the other Greek lads, they threw themselves into their duties with excited glee. Already good horsemen, they soon learned the western lore Pete and

Bigpig taught them. There were, of course, no guitars, but the boys were provided with zithers, and managed to master some ballads. Around the campfire that night the crowds listened intently while, "Git along, little dogie," resounded dulcetly over the broad Hellenic plains.

There was a barbecue. The rodeo was overwhelmingly successful, especially when Hercules bulldogged a giant steer. He had taught the hands how to handle lariats, and there was an exhibition of lassoing that was a highlight of the day. By the time most of the crowd had left, success was assured. Already there were more reservations than Pete could handle.

"We'll build new bunk-houses," Manx told Bigpig. "These mugs are used to sleeping on anything. We'll cram 'em in like sardines and tell 'em they're roughing it. What a take! And we don't have to split a penny with old Sticky-whiskers."

JUST then a messenger arrived from old Sticky-whiskers.

"A new labor for you, Hercules!" was the announcement. "The marshes of Arkadian Stympthalos are overrun with man-eating birds. King Eurystheus orders you to slay these demons."

A cheer went up from the remaining guests.

"Hercules! Son of Zeus! A new labor for Hercules!"

Pete cheered faintly with the rest, but his heart was descending rapidly. It thumped almost audibly into his sandals. Man-eating birds? Vultures? Eagles? Whatever they were, Hercules would have to obey the king—or else suffer unpleasant consequences. And, in the latter contingency, Pete himself would provide fodder for the man-eating horses.

"I always knew horses would ruin me," Mr. Manx moaned. "But not like this!"

However, two days later, Pete and Hercules marshaled the group of cowhands and rode toward the land of Arcady. A skeleton crew was left to take care of the ranch and the dudes; the taxicab business could take care of itself. But most of the punchers were with Pete and Bigpig, cantering on

with lariats looped at their odd-looking saddles, armed with spears and short swords instead of six-guns.

The manufacture of a pistol was beyond Pete's capabilities, though he was already making up a stock of fireworks for the next big rodeo.

"Nessus was behind this," Pete informed Hercules, who was writhing uncomfortably in the lion skin. "Stop scratching, will you?"

"Gosh—"

"Shut up. Nessus put the king up to setting you after these man-eating birds."

"Well, anyhow we know what they are," said Bigpig.

"Yeah. Somebody who'd seen 'em described 'em to me. Ostriches, that's what. How they got into this part of the country I dunno, but they did."

"How do you kill an ostrich, Pete?"

For answer Mr. Manx grinned and patted the lariat at his saddle-horn. . . .

It made a good story after they got back from Arkadian Stympthalos, after having fulfilled their errand. Centuries later the same story would be famous as one of Hercules' Twelve Labors; it would be written that the hero killed the birds one by one with his unerring arrows.

The actual incident was somewhat different. For one thing, Hercules played no part in it. He ran into a field of goldenrod and was incapacitated for several days. Pete and the punchers galloped after the ostriches, lassoed them, and killed the giant birds with their sharp blades. Thereafter, for a short time, Pete's taxi-drivers sold their customers ostrich-plumes at extremely exorbitant prices.

"Buy a feather for your girl friend's hair, buddy?" went the cry. And more money went into Pete's pockets, to the fury of Nessus and the king, whose plots once more had rebounded.

"What I can't figure out," Pete said bitterly as he sat on the corral and watched Hercules wash his lion skin, "is why you should be allergic to goldenrod now. You're not Bigpig. At least you haven't got his body. Your body belongs to Hercules."

"Maybe he was allergic to goldenrod, too, huh?"

Pete shrugged.

"Maybe. Wish we could get back to Nineteen-forty. The king's bound to get us sooner or later. He's after that franchise, and Nessus is after our hides."

Two days later Pete found himself locked out of his office. A king's soldier was on guard, and he grinned at Manx unpleasantly.

"You can't come in," he said. "His Majesty's taken over."

Pete's jaw dropped.

"Huh? Why, he can't do that! It's unconstitutional!"

"What's a constitution?" the soldier asked interestedly.

PETE didn't answer. He was hastening toward the palace. The bitterest pill of all was the fact that he had to pay to ride in one of his own taxicabs.

King Eurystheus and Nessus were, as usual, together. Pete burst into impassioned speech without preamble, but a spear jabbed into his midriff brought him to a halt.

"Be silent," the king said, stroking his beard. "Slaves are usually brought into the royal presence only for judgment."

"You can't swipe my business like this," Pete said stubbornly. "I got a franchise—" A horrible thought struck him. Two hours had passed since he had seen Bigpig. "Is Hercules okay?" he asked fearfully.

"As far as I know," was the response. "However, your franchise is worthless. We had forgotten, until today, that no slave can hold property in Tiryns. So, naturally, our agreement is invalid, and your company reverts to the crown."

Pete sputtered. Nessus grinned.

"I have given a new franchise to my faithful servant here," Eurystheus said, indicating the officer. "He now owns the—what is it—"

"The Nessus Cab Corporation," interjected the officer.

"I get it!" Manx's voice was bitter. "And you're giving the king a lot bigger rake-off than I did. Okay, shave-tail. You asked for it—and you're going to get it."

"We are merciful," said the king. "We allow you to live. Guards, throw this bum out." Eurystheus had picked

up some of Pete's own picturesque language. . . .

Mr. Manx wasted no time in giving his ready cash to Hercules who, being a freed man, could legally possess it. That done, he went into action. By this time he knew the ropes in Tiryns. He knew, for example, that the official who passed for chief of police was not above making a dishonest penny.

Thus it came about that Larsyas, this official, became extremely busy. Signs made their appearance in the streets. They said, "No Parking," "Parking Limit 100 Pulse-Beats," "Deliveries Only," and the like. Certain curbs were painted red. And, somehow, Nessus' taxi-drivers ran into trouble continually with the police force of Tiryns.

"I don't want a cent out of it," Pete explained to Larsyas. "I'm just showing you how to make yourself some dough. Maybe sometime you can do me a favor. Here's how it works. Whenever somebody gets a ticket, you fine 'em—see?"

"But—"

"And you need a speed limit. Make it different for each block, and keep the signs out of sight if you can. That's the way we work it back in the U. S. A."

Nessus blew up. He interviewed the bland Larsyas, who was already counting his ill-gotten gains, but got nowhere.

"Law is law," said the chief of police. "Every good citizen should uphold it."

Nessus said something unprintable.

"You're fined fifty gold pieces for contempt of court," Larsyas smiled. "What's that? Oh, you do, eh? That'll be fifty more."

Somehow the officer managed to choke back his retort. He turned to stride out.

"One moment," the chief called. "Something that will interest you. I'm making the—uh—main stem of Tiryns a one-way street hereafter."

"What?" Nessus turned green. "Why, you'll cut my fares in half!"

But Larsyas was drinking contentedly from a gilded bottle, filled with home-made brandy that Pete had distilled for him.

"Petros Mankos is behind this," Nessus choked. "I'm going to the king!"

CHAPTER IV

The Last Roundup

THE days passed, while Pete gloated over the wreckage of what had been a thriving taxicab industry. The officers were well-trained. They arrested drivers on every possible pretext, and, if they could, egged them on to fury, so that the additional charge of resisting an officer could be brought. Nessus refused to pay the fines himself, until he found nobody would work for him. It was too expensive.

"That'll show him," Pete grinned, idly rolling a pair of dice he had made. "We're cleaning up here at the dude ranch, and it's in your name. Nessus can go hang. We got the gravy."

"What if the big shot gets frisky again?" Bigpig asked.

"I found out something. You were bound out to Eurystheus for only twelve labors. The ostriches were the eleventh. One more, and you'll be free. The king won't be able to put the bee on you any more."

"Swell." Hercules was busy grinding charcoal. "Wait'll we pull off the next rodeo. It'll wow 'em, huh?"

It would, Pete thought. Everything was prepared for the second rodeo to advertise the ranch. This time there was an admission fee charged. Tiryns was placarded with announcements, cowboys in sandwich-boards rode about, and policemen energetically sold tickets to protesting taxi-drivers. The *chef d'oeuvre* of the affair was to be a fireworks display at night. For some time Pete had been busy manufacturing sparklers, Roman candles, crackers, and torpedoes. Saltpeter, willow charcoal, and sulphur were all he needed.

And then Tiryns heard of the hydra, a man-eating monster that laired in a salt-marsh near the sea!

Nessus smiled darkly. King Eurystheus grinned in his beard and set the date. In three days Hercules must set out to slay the hydra. If he failed—he would die, for the monster was carnivorous. If Hercules refused to undertake the task, he would be stoned to death.

Pete was far more worried than Bigpig. The latter had almost come to believe in his heroic prowess. Moreover, he had been practicing with the Hellenic weapons, and mastered them fairly well. Bigpig could now handle a sword, spear, or bow almost as well as any Greek soldier. He told Pete not to worry, and that he'd chop the hydra into mincemeat.

"I'll moider da bum," he remarked. "In de foist round."

Against his better judgment, Pete almost allowed himself to be convinced. After all, the body of Hercules was gigantic. It would take a pretty big monster to overcome the son of Zeus. But—what was the hydra?

Stories conflicted, each one more incredible than the last. Pete finally decided it was a sea-snake, and felt better.

On the morning of the fatal day Bigpig rose and called for his lion skin.

"Some rat swiped it," he declared. "I hoid somebody movin' around my room last night."

He went to the window.

"See? Footprints. Hey, Pete—"

"Here's the lion skin," Mr. Manx said wearily. "It was hanging out on the line. Dive into it and get going."

Bigpig obeyed. He tied the paws together over his chest and beamed.

"The boys are going to ride down to the swamp with me an' watch the killin'. You comin', Pete?"

"Sure. By the way, the king's got a lot of his soldiers camped on the plain a ways off. Wants to make sure you don't take a powder, I guess. Ready?"

THERE was no answer. Pete glanced at Bigpig, caught his breath.

"Biggie!" he yelled. "What the—"

"Flors!" gasped the unfortunate Mr. Callahan. "Flors! Glup—I can't breathe!"

His face purpled. Pete slapped him on the back, and a cloud of dust rose from the lion skin. Goldenrod-pollen!

"Take it off, Biggie!" Pete's fingers were tearing at the garment. "Peel, quick!"

But it was too late. By the time the skin was thrown out the window, Hercules was suffering the worst effects of

allergy. He lay in a corner, gasping and kicking.

Pete's lips tightened. So there *had* been an intruder last night! Sabotage—that's what it was. Somebody had discovered Bigpig's weakness, and had dusted the lion skin with the fatal goldenrod-pollen.

"Nessus," Pete gritted. "I'll bet he did it. That low-lived rat!"

A cry came from without.

"Hercules! Hasten! We wait!"

But Hercules was beyond answering. He lay prostrate, face swollen to twice its normal size, breathing hoarsely. He would recover presently—but not for a while. In the meantime he needed rest.

"We'll be along in a few hours," Pete called.

There was silence. Then: "The king's soldiers say that if Hercules doesn't start out in ten minutes they'll come after him."

Manx cursed. For the Hellenes to discover their popular hero stricken by a "curse from the gods" would be fatal. Somehow, Hercules had to ride to the hydra's swamp. And he had to start within ten minutes.

"These things always happen to me," Pete moaned, and slipped off his pillow-slip. He recovered the lion skin and donned it. The pollen didn't effect him, of course, and at a distance he might be mistaken for Hercules. But—

He bent over Bigpig.

"Listen, Biggie. I'm riding to the swamp. As soon as you can make it, come after me and take over. I'll try and stall till you get there. Okay?"

"*Glup* . . . yeah, sure . . . I'll moi-der da bum."

Pete went out by the back way. The ranch-hands were gathered there, and he explained part of the situation to them. They were ready to help in any way they could.

"Keep me screened from the troopers, see? We can't let 'em get too close. Let's see—where's the nag?"

Hercules' horse, a huge black stallion, was led up, ready. It was equipped with short-sword, javelins, bow and arrows, and a dozen lariats hanging around the saddle. Pete vaulted into place.

"Hightail it, boys," he yelped, setting the example. The fake Hercules and his followers galloped off, while the army of King Eurystheus, caught unprepared, milled in confusion. One small band of troopers broke from the rest and set out in pursuit. Looking back, Pete recognized the standard of Nessus—a golden centaur.

Hard and fast they rode. Perspiration covered them, and hours had passed before they reached the swamp, a low, desolate region of dark pools and quicksand, where a few thick, stunted trees grew. The troop of Nessus had reined in some distance back, unwilling to approach the lair of the monster.

Now the cowboys halted, looking askance at one another. Pete's heart sank. There was no sign of Hercules.

"Well," he said. "Guess I'll ride on a bit. Those Cossacks back there can still see me too plainly. Stick around, fellas."

SOMEBODY handed Pete a chunk of beef.

"That'll draw the hydra if you throw it into the water," he was informed.

Manx dropped the meat as though it had been death itself.

"Hey! I'm just going to stall till Hercules gets here. I'm no stand-in stunt man!"

There was no answer. The cowhands sat motionless in their saddles and watched Pete ride on, to halt by a gnarled tree not too close to the water's edge. He sat uneasily for a time, waiting. No Hercules. What a spot!

Pete examined his weapons. Javelins. Bow and arrows. Lots of lariats. A saddlebag containing—what? He investigated. Fireworks. The childish-minded Hercules had stuffed an assorted conglomeration of fireworks into the bag, apparently intending to let them off at some appropriate moment.

"What a slap-happy stumble-bum!" Pete remarked, and then turned into ice.

He hadn't thrown the beef into the water. There was nothing to draw the monster out of the depths. But—

The hydra was coming!

A ripple broke the surface. A snake-like object twisted up, heading straight for the shore where Pete stood in his

stirrups frozen, his hands twisted in the reins. Three more snakes popped up, and the wake of a gigantic bulk swirled into view. The horse went crazy.

Never completely broken, it bucked and sunfished like the wild thing it was. Pete saw himself sailing over the horse's head into the water. He shut his eyes and clung frantically. Something had to give. The girths snapped.

Pete and saddle thumped together on the ground, while the mustang departed for safer climes. Simultaneously a coil wound itself around Mr. Manx's leg.

His hand touched a rope. He managed to get to his knees, and saw a dozen tentacles reaching out of the water toward him. The body of a giant squid was darkly visible under the surface—a sea monster that had been washed into the salt marshes by some freak tidal wave. The grip on Pete's ankle was inexorable. He was being pulled toward the water.

The stunted tree wasn't too far away. Pete whirled the rope around his head and let fly. If he missed—

He didn't miss. The lasso settled and tightened over a stumpy, thick limb. Pete was pulled over backward, but managed to wind a coil of the rope about his waist. He took a timber hitch in it. The rope sang with strain.

Pete tried to pull himself free, but could not. Another tentacle curled about his thighs, binding his legs together. He got hold of a javelin and dug it again and again into the cold, slimy flesh, but without result. The baleful eyes of the hydra glared at him unwinkingly through the water.

No use to yell for help. He'd get none. Nessus was probably laughing at the sight of his supposed enemy being devoured by the monster.

Pete started to get mad. Just then he saw the bag of fireworks.

His eyes lit up. Maybe— He had an idea.

Pete had manufactured matches long ago. He had some in his pocket. It was almost impossible to get them out, but at last he managed. Meanwhile the dragging strain was almost cutting him in two.

Roman candles! They were the things. Pete lit a handful and pointed

them at the thick, cablelike tentacles. Red fire burst forth, sputtering and flaming angrily.

IT worked! Where steel hadn't daunted the monster, fire did. Or, at least, the hydra was surprised. The tentacles drew back from the searing flames, and Pete instantly sprang to his feet and ran like hell. He stopped only when the rope jerked him back.

He looked around. The squid lay with its tentacles waving, its huge body submerged. Out of its reach, Pete was safe. Then, cautiously, he gathered the other lariats.

The first loop he flung settled over a tentacle, but slipped free. The second try was more successful. One by one Pete lassoed the waving arms of the creature, anchoring them to the tree. Whether or not the ropes would hold he couldn't say; he could only wait. And, still clutching a Roman candle, he did.

The ropes drew taut. They sang and snapped—but held. Luckily, Pete had captured all of the squid's tentacles, and on this flat, shelving bottom, the monster could get no purchase grip to make use of its weight and strength.

The ropes held! The hydra was conquered!

Pete turned and yelled. The monster could be slain at leisure now, or simply left to starve to death. Right now he needed his cowboys, so he could get a horse and gallop back to the ranch before the deception was discovered.

The thunder of hoofs came to his ears. He saw Nessus bearing down on him, handsome face twisted in a gloating smile, eyes gleaming. Before Pete could stir, he was picked up bodily and thrown across the saddle in front of the Greek officer. The point of a dagger pricked his back.

"Don't move, Petros Mankos—impostor!" Nessus commanded. "We're going to the king—and I'll show him that it's you, not Hercules, who wears the lion's skin!"

Pete was acutely uncomfortable. The horse's gallop jarred him till he was nearly seasick, and sometimes the dagger would slip down painfully. He heard a cry.

"Ride 'im, cowboy!"

He looked back. The mustangs of the cowhands were racing in pursuit, dust rising from their heels. Beyond them, far behind, came the troop of Nessus. Could Pete's would-be rescuers reach him in time?

Nessus laughed and dug his spurs deep. The steed sprang forward with renewed speed. The officer bent low as an arrow whistled past.

"Hey!" Pete yelled. "You'll hit me!"

But the cowboys didn't care about that. As long as Hercules' reputation went untarnished, they'd be satisfied—if they had to kill both Nessus and Pete to accomplish their ends. Their wails went up to the blue sky.

"Yippee! Ride 'im, cowboy! Yippee!"

In another moment, Pete knew, the arrows would find their mark. Nessus, grimly silent, drove the horse on. His dagger did not stir from the captive's back. Pete noticed, abruptly, that he held something in his hand. The Roman candle. . . .

Somehow he got the matches out of his pocket without attracting Nessus' attention. How he lit the fuse he never knew, in that gusting wind. Arrows were singing viciously past him. The dust-clouds choked him. The thunder of hoofs deafened him. He lit the candle and aimed it—

Swish! In front of the horse's nose a spurt of raving fire blasted! The horrified animal tried to turn inside out and start running the other way. It only succeeded in doing a somersault. But that was effective enough. Pete felt himself flying through the air, and fell heavily atop a body that whooped hoarsely once and was silent.

He got up dizzily from Nessus' prostrate form. The officer was out cold.

The cowhands came riding up. One of them extended a hand, and helped Pete vault to the saddle behind him.

"Ride 'im, cowboy!"

They fled toward the ranch, hopelessly outdistancing the troop. Pete breathed again. Nessus' story would never be believed now. Hercules' reputation was safe—even enhanced. For the son of Zeus had slain the hydra!

Bang!

* * * * *

"Hello, Pete," said Doctor Mayhem. "How are you feeling?"

"Wh-what?" Mr. Manx stared around at the laboratory. Greece had vanished.

The cowboys were gone. He was back in New York.

"I finally succeeded in repairing the machine," Dr. Mayhem said. "I brought back your wrestler friend, Bigpig, first."

Pete staggered erect.

"Where is he?"

"I sent him to the hospital. He had a bad case of—well, he must have run into some goldenrod. But he'll come around in a day or so. What happened, anyhow, Pete?"

IT was a long story, but at last it was finished, to Mayhem's intense satisfaction. He had been hanging on every word.

"Hercules, eh? That clears up so many mysteries. The man-eating birds—ostriches, you say? And the hydra was a squid? Amazing. Even the shirt of Nessus that was supposed to have killed Hercules—" Doctor Mayhem seemed amused.

"Yeah." Pete glanced at the door.

"It seems to me I came here with the idea of asking you if you could cure Bigpig. That was quite a while ago, but I'd still like to know."

"I'm afraid not." The scientist's voice was regretful.

Manx sighed. "I guess I'll just have to keep him away from goldenrod, if I expect him to stay in condition for more fights, then," he said.

Mayhem slapped his hand to his forehead.

"Oh, I forget, Pete. Your friend told me to tell you he was finished with the wrestling profession. He said that when he got out of the hospital he was going back to Montana."

There was silence for two minutes. At length Pete drew himself together and made for the door.

"See you later, Doc," he said. "I've got something important to attend to, right away."

"You have? What?"

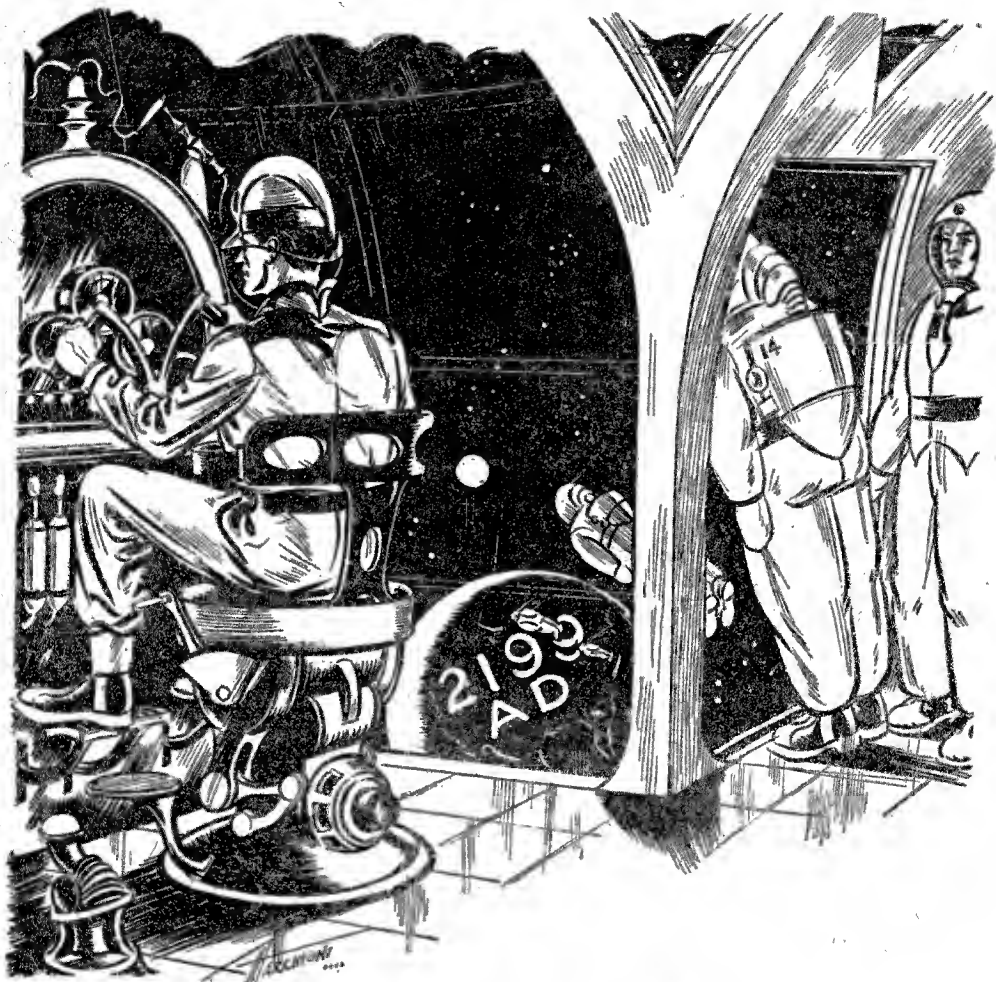
Mr. Manx's grin was enough to frighten babies.

"Oh, nothing much," he shrugged, as he closed the door behind him. "I just want to send Biggie some—*flowers!*"

BLIND VICTORY

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

Author of "The Stolen Spectrum," "The Kid from Mars," etc.



The space-suit clad men dived out into the void

THE space-freighter, *Rex*, carrying a cargo of twenty thousand tons of Wiltonite, had passed the orbit of Mars and was decelerating. Flagship of the government fleet of rockets operating between the uranium mines on Jupiter and the fueling ports of Earth, the *Rex* was king of the space-ways.

Inside the ship, two young men in the uniform of Confederate World Space Service stood together in the chief navigator's office. So much alike there could be no doubt they were

**Night Did Not Fall When the
Last Day Dawned on Earth—
Until Man Put the Darkness
Out with Letters of Fire!**

brothers, Robert Carroll was the commander and Martin Carroll the first astrologator of the vessel. Both of them tall and lithe, blue-eyed and brown-haired, less than eighteen months difference in their ages, these famous brothers had been inseparable

from their early childhood.

Bob, the elder, was rated the best pilot in the service. Martin, the astrogator, was a mental marvel. Without the use of instruments, paper or pencil, he could triangulate any sort of course or maneuver. Bob could estimate what the reactions were going to be as fast as his brother could finish his equations. The two of them functioned as a perfect team. That was the reason the *Rex* was the crack ship of the service.

"Well, yonder is the old ball of mud—rolling serenely on her way through space," said Captain Bob Carroll with a sigh of great relief as he turned from the eye-pieces of the electro-telescope.

Martin Carroll's sensitive face registered faint triumph as well as relief as he turned it toward his brother.

"So you were somewhat worried over the continued silence of the communication system, after all."

"Frankly, yes," admitted Bob, smiling now. "It was queer—that sudden blanking out of the communication beam before we left Jupiter. But there is Earth right where she belongs. We'll be home in three days and likely find out the trouble is in our own directional beam tube.

"Exactly sixty-five hours," Martin corrected. "There's no doubt that Wiltonite fuel has made commercial space travel a success. It's the most powerful explosive ever perfected. But what makes you think the radio trouble may be in our own equipment? We've picked up the Martian stations without any trouble."

A SHADOW of concern flitted across Bob Carroll's face.

"You're too damned technical, Mr. Carroll," he said affectionately. "Let me tell you that old *terra firma* looks mighty good spinning along there on her way to meet us. God bless the inventor of the electro-telescope."

"Describe," said the chief astrogator lazily, making no move to get up from his chair and peer into the telescope's eye-piece for himself.

His eye fastened to the 'scope, the older brother gave a concise astronomical report on Earth as he observed it. Martin Carroll listened intently, his

head cocked slightly to one side with the alert air of a terrier.

"Sounds all right," Martin admitted in relief as the captain finished. "We'd better go to the conning tower and set the final figures up for the first relief pilot. I've just worked 'em out for correct deceleration with forty million pounds of dead weight in the holds. You loaded the *Rex* up to the gills this trip, didn't you?"

"Clear up to the hairline," his brother admitted shamelessly. "Without Wiltonite the heavy rockets don't space. The *Rex* is the only craft that dares carry a full cargo of the explosive stuff. You wouldn't be a bit anxious over Marcia, would you?"

"Would you?" countered Martin from his seat at the table.

A faint grimace of pain crossed Bob's face as he stood behind his brother. He thought of the words Marcia Warren had spoken the only time he had ever openly declared his love.

"Don't, Bob!" the girl had protested brokenly. "Don't tell me that. Don't make it any harder for me. Your brother—Martin—loves me, too. I simply couldn't—tell him I didn't care. So I can never marry you as long as Martin lives—and cares. Can I?"

White-faced and strained, Bob had replied: "No, of course not. I—didn't know about Mart. But I should have guessed that both of us would love you. Forgive me, Marcia. I guess I can stand it if—if you marry Mart."

"But I don't love Mart—like that," Marcia had replied gravely. "It's you, Bob. But you wouldn't want me to do any differently, would you?"

"God forbid," Bob Carroll had said stoutly.

He had folded Marcia tenderly in his arms, and kissed her gently on her fair forehead. Thereafter, never by word or tone or inflection when the three of them were together could Martin Carroll tell that they had reached a triangulation in their private lives as great as any equation he had solved in space.

Now the captain affectionately rumbled the wavy chestnut hair on his brother's head and crammed the chief astrogator's cap on the mussed-up locks.

"You bet I would!" he said fervently. "If anything were to happen to John Carroll or that adopted sister of ours I think I'd go crazy. Come on."

"If anything happened to either Father or Marcia, I believe I would die," said Martin Carroll simply as he rose and placed his hand on his brother's shoulder.

"What? And leave me to jockey the *Rex* through space all by myself?" chafed Bob, throwing an arm tenderly about the young man's shoulders.

FORTY-eight hours later the dully glowing blue disk that was Earth swam out of the black immensity of space and assumed its familiar outline and color. And still the radio beam was dead, although the *Rex's* radio operator had no trouble communicating with Mars or Jupiter. Communication with Earth was impossible, although Earth rolled majestically onward in a perfectly normal fashion.

There was only one thing wrong—something was missing that the captain of the *Rex* overlooked at first, so busy was he in scanning the planet itself. It was Scott, the first officer, who brought the matter to his attention.

"Look! Captain Carroll—the umbra and penumbra of Earth are *missing*!"

Bob started and stared. Swiftly he adjusted the controls of the electro-telephone. Scott was right. Difficult to see against the refractionless black of space, but always present and extending for hundreds of thousands of miles out on the shadowed side away from the Sun, the false shadow and the true conical shadow of Earth were missing.

"The shadows are sometimes difficult to see," said Martin Carroll from his chair at the chart table.

"No, Mart!" exclaimed his brother sharply. "Scott is right. There is no umbra. Earth is casting no shadow and there is sunlight all around it. There is no night! It—it's impossible!"

"Check your instruments!" Martin Carroll ordered as he clutched his head with both hands to concentrate on the crazy problem. "What time is it?"

"Two-seven, P. M., Eastern Standard Earth Time," informed the first officer, glancing at a chronometer set among the star clocks.

"Then we are roughly one million miles out," said the chief astrogator. "Bob, set the manual controls for one degree right ascension and give half a burst from number three port rockets. We'd best swing in an orbit around Earth and make sure we aren't suffering from optical illusions. I've got to figure this thing out. No radio communication . . . no shadow . . . no new source of light. . . ."

The little group fell silent as the *Rex* responded to the helm and curved in a great trajectory on the new course. Faint groans of apprehension escaped more than one pair of lips as the fact became established beyond all doubt that the entire world was bathed in perpetual sunlight!

Which, of course, was impossible.

"Good God!" cried the pilot as the Western Hemisphere came fully into view. "What is that? *Letters of fire!*"

NO longer requiring the electro-telephone, the captain and first officer stood shoulder to shoulder and stared out through the forward observation port. In huge, glowing letters—like the neon signs of the twentieth century—stretching across the entire width of the United States of America from the Pacific to the Atlantic, was a two-word phrase.

SAVE EARTH

"Save Earth," read Bob Carroll aloud. "From British Columbia almost to Florida—save Earth. It's a huge signboard in space!"

"Look!" exclaimed the first officer, clutching his commander's arm.

Bob Carroll continued to stare. Down below, on the great globe of Earth, the nine huge letters winked out of being. In their stead, in the middle of the continent, appeared a number. It was a date.

2199
A D

The *Rex's* commander read the date aloud in a queer voice.

"But that's wrong!" cried Scott. "This is July of the year Twenty-two

hundred and ten. Or are we going mad?"

Martin Carroll lifted his head suddenly.

"Bob, did you say Twenty-one ninety-nine?"

Before the captain could verify this there was a gasp from Brewster, the pilot.

"Look!" he shouted. "The date has blinked out and the words have come back!"

They had, indeed. At intervals of one-minute durations that incomprehensible signboard of Earth flashed its changing message: SAVE EARTH—2199 A D — SAVE EARTH — 2199 A D. That it was an urgent message of some kind to somebody there could be no doubt. That it was centrally controlled was obvious.

"I tell you it's Twenty-two ten!" shouted Scott, clutching his captain by the shoulder. "Let's get down there and find out what the hell's wrong, sir. I've got a wife and three kids down there who may be needing me!"

"Snap out of it, Scott!" said the commander sternly, giving the officer a little shake. "Of course this is Twenty-two ten. But that Twenty-one ninety-nine has a special significance."

Captain Carroll turned to look at his brother who had risen to his feet and was advancing toward the observation port, his blue eyes wide and staring.

"A special significance," the astro-gator repeated. And then both brothers exclaimed together:

"The Interplanetary Garden!"

* * * *

THERE wasn't the least warning that June 12, 2210, was going to be any different, astronomically speaking, than any other June 12 of mankind's recorded history. But there was a startling departure from the usual order of things. For June 12 did not end. It was the last day.

The sun lowered as usual below the rim of the western horizon, but twilight, dusk, and dark did not follow in their proper order. Instead, the daylight seemed to grow stronger.

Simultaneously, all over the world, radio communication went completely haywire. It was worse than the static

of a thousand sunspots. Of all the mad things to happen, the most grimly significant was this utter and absolute failure of wireless transmission. So dependent had Earth become on wireless impulses that there ensued at once an indescribable state of chaos.

All stratosphere liners and airline transports lost their power and directional beams and were grounded—or plunged to destruction. The electromagnetic gravity nullifier, developed in the second half of the twentieth century and unlocking the door to spatial flight, went out of commission as completely as radio and wireless power. For no fuel had yet been developed—not even Wiltonite—that would, without the gravity nullifier, lift the lightest rocket at sufficient initial velocity to escape the attraction of Earth's mass.

And all communication with interplanetary rocket ships and with the power stations on the colonized major planets was cut off abruptly as though a master surgeon had severed the vocal chords of all Earth.

NIGHT did not fall. True, the Sun rose in the east and set in the west with monotonous regularity, proving that Earth was still properly spinning on its axis, but there was only perpetual day. Earth began building up terrific temperatures which would have killed people off like flies had it not been for the weathercast stations that dotted every continent.

These weather-control stations, developed in the twenty-second century, reached their highest peak of efficiency in 2195 under the direction of Professor John Carroll. Now they were functioning full blast to prevent men and plants and animals from being steamed alive, while scientists sought frantically for the cause of the catastrophe and a remedy.

The polar caps were rapidly melting and the seas were rising at an alarming rate, driving people inland from coastal countries and inundating island after island. And over everything hung the humid, steaming atmosphere of a tropical jungle, an atmosphere that wasn't content to remain just that, but was slowly approaching the tempera-

ture of live steam.

Finally a couple of mathematicians got together with three astronomer-physicists, and they plotted the course and direction of the constant bending of light rays. To their amazement, the answer they got was—the planet Mercury!

This was ridiculous! The most elementary school child knew that the two inferior planets—Mercury and Venus—were uninhabited and uninhabitable, that organic life was impossible on those two outposts of the Sun where rivers could only be molten bismuth on the one and the coolest temperature could only be live steam on the other.

In the past two hundred years every space pioneer who had dared explore inward toward the Sun had failed to return. The intense heat of the Sun was incinerating, fatal.

All of which didn't change the fact that the figures showed the sphere of artificial agitation which bent the Sun's rays around the Earth and caused tidal waves, blanketed wireless, rising temperature, and all the other ills and inconveniences which led up to the door of utter annihilation—was on Mercury. It was at this point that science bowed its head and called upon Professor John Carroll.

Professor Carroll was retired now. He lived quietly on his farm near Fort Wayne, Indiana, and raised weird mutations of fruits and vegetables from the four known worlds under a weather-control system of visible light beams of his own devising. He was in his glass-enclosed pagoda with the air-conditioning unit running full blast when the delegation came to see him.

"Indeed, gentlemen, this is a surprise," the professor said in his dry, gentle voice as he recognized more than one friend—or enemy—in the group of savants who waited upon him. "Let me hasten to bid you welcome to my humble abode. You are acquainted with my ward, Miss Marcia Warren?"

THE visitors reddened a trifle more than the mounting temperature of the weather warranted and hemmed and hawed as the professor amiably shook hands. Marcia smiled graciously, overlooking the confusion of

her guardian's callers. She knew why they were embarrassed.

The three men were here to eat humble pie.

For Professor Carroll was a versatile man. Not content with being the director of weathercasting for the entire world, in the year 2199 he had written a book on the flora and fauna of the several planets. The title of this revolutionary masterpiece was "The Interplanetary Garden." In this book the professor devoted three chapters to theory about possible life on Venus and Mercury.

The dissension Charles Darwin had caused with his "Origin of Species" was a mild breeze compared to the tempest Carroll stirred up with his theory of sentient metallic life on Venus and helium creatures of intelligence on Mercury. Before the end of the year the otherwise creditable book was suppressed and the professor was removed from his high office. Indeed, the year 2199 was not one to be easily forgotten by the Carroll family.

"Ahem—er—not to beat aimlessly around the bush, Professor," said Dr. Thornley Bedloe, dean of mathematics and physics of World Science Institute, "we have come to talk to you about the alarming condition now confronting Earth. At the present rate of increasing heat, in spite of the weathercast stations, the deadline of continued existence for the human race is July the nineteenth. That is scarcely a week away. Professor Carroll, it is my wish and the wish of all my colleagues to offer you our abject apologies for what we did to you and 'The Interplanetary Garden' eleven years ago, and to ask of you — that is — oh, for God's sake, can't you do something to avert disaster? You foresaw things in your great work of which the world did not even dream. Can't you figure some way out?"

"Yes, Professor Carroll," urged the leader of the World Cabinet. "Why should an alien form of life such as must exist on Mercury suddenly make war on us — and without warning? Why should this happen to us?"

"I see," said Professor Carroll, quietly. "Then you are agreed that other forms of life than the carbon com-

pounds—than even physical and organic compounds—might possibly exist on planes that man does not dream of and cannot begin to presume to understand?"

"There can be no other answer," said Dr. Bedloe earnestly. "We know that no form of life similar to man can exist as close to the Sun as Venus. And patient cross-checking has shown beyond the shadow of a doubt that something upon Mercury is artificially causing the terrible refraction of light and the warping of the Sun's rays to destroy Earth. It is all so senseless. Not how, but why the inhabitants of Mercury would destroy the world!"

"**P**ERHAPS, from their standpoint, it is not so senseless," contradicted Professor Carroll. "Let's see—Mercury is about two-fifths the diameter of Earth. It receives about seven times as much light and heat from the Sun that Earth does. And only one-half of the planet is habitable—providing we agree that certain forms of life exist that can stand from four hundred to eight hundred degrees of temperature."

"You speak of an assault on Earth without warning. How could creatures of a possible helium or gaseous structure, whose very life force is heat so intense that solid metals such as tin and lead flow like water, even begin to communicate with us? And why would they care to do so? There is nothing in common between us—not even as much as there is between a man and a mold."

"And why should they attack Earth by turning perpetual sunshine on it? For what other reason than to raise Earth's temperature to a degree which their form of life could tolerate?"

"You—you mean the Mercurians would—would attempt to colonize Earth?" whispered Dr. Bedloe, aghast at the horrible thought.

Professor Carroll shrugged. "Why not? They won't be the first creatures to demand more *leben-raum*."

"Good God, man! You are jesting!" cried the cabinet leader.

Professor Carroll dropped his suave and lackadaisical manner. "On the contrary, gentlemen," he said crisply,

"I mean every word of it. I have been checking with instruments for day after day. I can assure you that those of you who arrived at Mercury for the answer to our trouble are one hundred percent correct. Mercury, or the inhabitants of Mercury, are responsible for our plight—their purpose is undoubtedly colonization—their form of life is unquestionably alien and strange—and there is nothing that I can do about it."

"You—you mean there's no hope, then?" whispered Dr. Bedloe.

"There was none before you came to me," corrected Professor Carroll solemnly. "There may be little now, but there is a chance. As it is impossible to take a rocket ship off from Earth to combat our enemy, we must use a ship that is, obviously, already away from Earth. Since there is no chance of communicating with such a ship by radio, we must communicate visually, and we can only hope that the recipient of our necessarily brief message has the intelligence to interpret it properly and take the right steps. The rest will be on the lap of the gods."

"What kind of a solution is this?" complained Bedloe bitterly, while the others merely groaned in despair.

"I know it is just a gamble," said Professor Carroll. "But it is all we have. My two sons aboard the *Rex* are due back from Jupiter the day after tomorrow. I know they are in a fever of uneasiness due to Earth's radio silence. They will be studying Earth carefully as their ship approaches. And I must have immediate and complete control of all the weathercast bureaus in the Western Hemisphere! I will chart a series of horizontal red and yellow beams of light from station to station that will spell out a comprehensible message to my boys. It has to be on a vast scale so that it can be read before the *Rex* comes close enough to be trapped by Earth's gravitational pull above the power of their rockets. And I want that message to start flashing as quickly as possible. That's all I can do, gentlemen."

FOR the next twenty-four hours the telegraph wires hummed all over the United States. Electricians and

mechanics worked and sweated like madmen all over the country in their frantic efforts to hook up the weather beam stations as per the explicit directions telegraphed from temporary headquarters set up in Chicago.

At last Professor Carroll, with an anxious-faced but brave Marcia at his side, sat before a huge control board and began manipulating master switches which in turn manipulated and activated numerous other switches across the face of the continent.

"Our red beam is shooting northwest from Chicago," announced Dr. Bedloe anxiously from the window of the tall building. "I only hope that the entire system is functioning as it should."

"How can we tell?" demanded one of the technicians.

"We can't," said the professor, smiling faintly. "We are too close to the sign. We would have to be at least ten thousand miles out in space in order to read it."

"How far do you think it can be read?" demanded Dr. Bedloe.

"With the electro-telescope, at least a million miles," Carroll replied, glancing at his watch and flipping out a series of switches before pressing home a second series.

"The Chicago beam has changed direction," announced Dr. Bedloe from the window.

"We should be spelling or writing the date—Twenty-one ninety-nine," explained the professor. "Sixty seconds of that and then back to 'SAVE EARTH'. And that is all we can do from now on, gentlemen. Except that you might start praying that the Rex is coming back to Earth on time and that the Carroll boys will interpret my message correctly—and then be able to figure a solution."

"Save Earth!" snorted Bedloe. "Twenty-one ninety-nine, A.D.! I think your message is crazy, Carroll."

"Yes," said the professor succinctly as he manipulated his switches. "You thought so in Twenty-one ninety-nine."

* * * *

BREWSTER, the young pilot of the Rex, turned his strained face toward his captain.

"What can be causing those letters,

sir?" He asked curiously.

"There is nothing that could do it except the light beams of the weather-cast bureaus," explained Bob briefly. "It's obviously a message for the eyes because Earth's radio won't function."

"Weathercast stations!" exclaimed Martin Carroll. "That date! Bob, only Dad could have hooked up those stations to flash that word. That message must be from him. And you know what happened in Twenty-one ninety-nine."

"Will any Carroll ever forget!" growled Bob. "That was the year Dad was disgraced for his theories about Mercury published in 'The Interplanetary Garden'."

"That's it!" cried the astrogator sharply. "Somehow that's a message to us from Dad. And the clue is in that book. Haven't we a copy aboard the Rex?"

"Yes—in my cabin," said Bob. "Come."

In the privacy of the commander's cabin Martin sprawled at ease on the berth while his brother read aloud the section of Professor Carroll's book on the sunward planets. An hour later Martin expelled a tremendous sigh.

"That's it," he said. "Dad has told us as plainly as by a two-way hook-up that Earth is in trouble, and the danger spot is Venus or Mercury. Let's get to the navigator's office and run some tests to see if we can check it."

It was four hours later that Martin Carroll lowered his tired head to rest his feverish face in his hands. His brother stared down at the back of his head with eyes that were wide with horror.

"Good God, Martin!" he murmured. "It's incredible! Mercury attacking Earth by bending the Sun's rays. Why, we don't even know there is life on Mercury. We have only Dad's theory that intelligent life doesn't necessarily have to conform to organic carbon patterns."

"We do know now," said the younger brother, smiling wearily. "Every test, every gauge, every equation works out to an artificial disturbance and ray distorter on one spot on Mercury. We've got to destroy it and do it quickly, or all life on Earth will

most certainly perish."

"That's why Dad sent his visual message," Bob commented gravely. "But how did he think we could save—"

Bob Carroll broke off suddenly and stared at his brother in a peculiar manner. Martin, particularly sensitive to things like this, again raised his head.

"You've thought of a way, Bob," he accused quietly. "What is it?"

"A way, yes," answered the captain slowly, solemnly. "But a terrible way. And it means an inevitable sacrifice."

"You mean—make a bomb out of our ship—blast that spot on Mercury out of existence?"

"Exactly," said Bob in a curt, flat tone. "Maybe bomb Mercury itself out of existence. Who knows what our cargo of twenty thousand tons of Wiltonite at full acceleration with a detonator head on the Rex will do?"

Martin passed his hand over his face and shuddered.

"My God!" he whispered. "The holocaust would be awful."

"The crew!" murmured the captain of the Rex. "We can't demand such a sacrifice of them. There is only one thing to do. We'll have to compute our course and cut across between Earth and Moon at a height of fifty thousand miles from Earth and let all the men dive from the aft port in space suits. They'll make it safely to Earth, and we can rocket on."

"Like parachute troops of the twentieth century, eh?" said Martin, smiling wanly. "Yes, that will work, Bob. But listen"—he hesitated slightly, then went on—"there's no need of—of us both going. One of us can do the job successfully. Remember Dad and Marcia. You wouldn't—er—flip a coin, would you?"

"No, I wouldn't," Bob replied softly. "But you are right, Mart. There's Dad—and Marcia. And one of us is enough to unload this egg on Mercury. So you're going to bail out with the rest of the crew and carry on for those we love."

"No, Bob," protested the other, starting up in swift protest. "That isn't fair. If one of us must die, it is best that I—"

"Skip it!" interrupted the captain. "I've already made up my mind, and

I'm skipper of this potential bomb. Come on to the control room and figure the proper triangulation for me to make a bull's-eye on the dirty Mercutian spot causing all our trouble, while I talk to the entire crew and explain things."

MMARTIN CARROLL held out his hand, and his brother gripped it.

"Wait just a minute, Bob," he said brokenly. "We're practically saying good-bye right now. And we've never been separated before."

Bob uttered a little snort and his arms went around his brother in a great big hug. His lips were pressed for an instant against the younger man's forehead—just as he had kissed Marcia Warren not so terribly long ago.

"So long, bud," he murmured affectionately. "Take good care of them. You know I know you're capable."

"Yeah," muttered Martin, pressing his face firmly against the cheek of his brother. "So long—skipper."

They walked to the control room arm in arm, and Bob left the astrogator there to work out his new equation while he went to address the assembled crew.

Martin spoke quietly to the young pilot who got the message from the loudspeaker.

"Brewster!"

"Yes, sir?" answered the pilot.

"We haven't any time to lose. Get your space suit and supply equipment and come back here to get me at the last minute. Understand?"

"Yes, sir. Gladly, sir."

"Go ahead. I'll take over."

A bit later the captain entered the control room with a space suit over his arm.

"Here, Martin," he called crisply. "Let me help you get into this thing. The crew are waiting at the port aft air lock. I'll give you the gauge readings before I fasten the headgear, and you can call off the proper equation to set things so I don't miss the mark. I can easily correct minor discrepancies by manual control as I near the target—such as the pull of the Sun throwing the ship off."

"If it weren't for that necessity we could both jump ship and trust to ini-

tial control settings to take this flying bomb there."

"I know that!" said Bob impatiently. "Quit stalling, and get into this suit."

"Are you ready, sir?" came the voice of Brewster from the door.

"Yes," whispered Martin Carroll softly as his hand crept up along his brother's arm to his chin. "I'm—ready!"

As he said this, Martin suddenly doubled his fist and let drive a murderous short-arm jab that connected squarely with Bob's jaw. The captain grunted and started sagging, crumpling at the knees.

"Here, Brewster!" Martin called out sharply. "Get the captain into this space suit he brought. Snap into it! We're changing places. He's jumping ship with you men. I'm taking the *Rex* on to Mercury. Is the detonator fused to the hold and properly set?"

"Yes, sir, but do you think—" began the pilot in a trembling voice.

"I know," snapped the astrogator in a hard tone. "Get that suit on my brother. Now then, read the position to me from the gauges."

"Yes, sir," said the stunned Brewster, complying.

"Good," nodded Martin Carroll. "Set up this triangulation—and as you hope to live out a normal life, don't make any error!"

He called out an equation, and felt the great freighter tremble slightly as the craft responded to the firing order the pilot set up.

"Now, I'll take the control board," he said shortly, sliding into the padded chair before the banks of keys. "Take Captain Carroll back to Mr. Scott's care. Dive out when I ring this alarm bell. And see that the last man sets the automatic airlock before he abandons ship. That's all!"

"Yes, sir. And good-by, sir! I'm saluting you, sir!"

One minute later the strident note of an alarm bell rang throughout the huge ship. As the freighter cut across the face of Earth at elevation of fifty thousand miles, the aft port lock opened on the airless void, and white-suited men began diving gracefully down toward the great globe that was home.

Like large snowflakes they drifted downward from the lock of the rocket whose tail tubes were already glowing red with the accelerating bursts of Wiltonite.

THIRTY-TWO hours later, from his drifting position in space with First Officer Scott beside him, Captain Bob Carroll tried to look Sunward. He couldn't see the flash, nor hear the terrific concussion, but he knew that his brother had succeeded in his heroic endeavor. For, like the sputtering fuse of dynamite, a line of living light seemed to ripple Earthward.

In something like eight minutes the line of light rippled across space, struck the Earth almost like a visible shock, and magically a cone of black shadow sprang out from Earth on the side away from the Sun.

And it was night again where night should be.

It was another week before Bob Carroll and his crew were rescued just off the Pacific Coast and rushed by strato-liner to Chicago. Here, in the midst of the wildest rejoicing, Bob made his report to his father. The bitter lines about the spaceman's mouth had softened somewhat as he enfolded Marcia Warren in his arms and rested his head on her shoulder to cry.

"It was wonderful! Simply miraculous!" praised Dr. Bedloe. "But what I cannot understand is why you let Martin make that sacrifice. I—er—always understood that the old tradition was for the captain to stay with his—ah—ship."

"He couldn't help it—if it's any of your business, sir!" spoke up Brewster fiercely. "Martin Carroll knocked the captain out."

"Oh!" said Dr. Bedloe, glancing at the former captain of the *Rex*. "Queer that he should choose to make the sacrifice. And I wonder that he was able to pilot the ship so successfully into such sheer brilliance of light."

"Oh, you damned fool!" grated First Officer Scott. "You don't know much of anything, do you? Martin Carroll was stone blind from birth! Now, let's get out of here and leave what's left of this family in peace."

Next Issue: **OUT OF THE YEARS**, by Ivan Sandrof

CRASH ON VIAR

By JOSEPH J. MILLARD

Author of "Master of the Walking Dead," "Thirty Fathoms Peril," etc.



The Shadow of
Death on Airless
Worlds Drives Men
to Perform Deeds of
Murder—and Scientific
Laws Bring Them to Justice!

THORNE insisted there was nothing outside the shell of the wrecked space cruiser—no air, no pressure, no heat, no light. Only utter, absolute nothingness lay above the mineral-dust surface of dead Viar, third moon of Votan, the last planet beyond Pluto.

But Jackson knew better. There was something outside. Death waited patiently, unrelentingly, hovering above the wrecked craft on black, silent wings. This was death's domain. It was only a matter of time until these two rash microcosms of life, unwilling invaders, should yield themselves to death's mandates.

Jackson knew this. Feeling the

"Damn you!" he shrieked. "You came back to trick me!"

feather touch of death's exploring fingers against his brain, he shivered as he watched Thorne make one last hopeless try for contact with life's outpost.

"If I could stretch transmission range just a fraction of a parse more," Thorne muttered through set teeth, "I could reach the guard station on Pluto. I'm going to try to overpower this rig long enough to get a call through. It may blow out instantly, of course, but I don't see that even then we'd be any worse off than we are now."

He bent over the communicator, which had been miraculously undamaged by the crash. Deliberately he turned the power controls up above the red danger-bar. The whole assembly began to hum, warning of the impending blowout. But still Thorne grimly fed power, easing it delicately into the instruments until its shrill protest was louder than the cosmic drone from the receiver.

Jackson, hunched forward on the copilot's seat, set his teeth and blinked a sudden flood of cold perspiration from his eyes. His fingernails dug into his palms, but he did not feel the pain.

"Calling Pluto," Thorne droned into the transmitter for the hundredth time. "Calling Space Guard Station Nineteen on Pluto. Astrophysical exploration ship *Meteor* calling Pluto. Answer quickly if you catch this."

They both heard it, then. A faint, infinitely distant whisper of sound penetrated the eternal cosmic drone in the receiver. It was the sound of a human voice—the first to reach their ears in eight months of extra-galactic wandering!

SPACE GUARD STATION NINETEEN on Pluto calling the *Meteor*. We hear your transmission faintly. Come through again if you can. Give location and condition of ship."

"Pray that the blowout holds off," Thorne flung over his shoulder as he flipped the switch. "Pluto, we're wrecked on Viar, less than a degree from the north pole. Send rescue expedition at once. We're unhurt, but our food supplies are running low and there isn't a living thing on this satellite. Hurry!"

"Be on our way in an hour," came the answering whisper. "Hang on any way you can. It will take us six to seven weeks to reach you. Can you last that—"

Whoof!

With a surge of blasting overpower, the whole communicator system blew out. The lights went too. There was a terrifying interval of absolute blackness until Thorne's sure, unhurried fingers found and switched on the emergency circuit.

"Boy, am I glad it held until we established contact!" he breathed, wiping his broad forehead. "Now all we've got to do is play two-handed poker for six or seven weeks."

"S-six or s-seven weeks?" Jackson could barely recognize that hoarse, terrified croak as his own voice. "But—but we can't! We haven't enough—"

"Food?" Thorne finished, eyeing his white-faced partner narrowly. "We'll make out, now that we have to. We have enough food to get along for two weeks. By stretching it, we can make it last between three and four weeks. After that?" He shrugged.

"After that we starve in dead earnest. But we'll make it. Life is a pretty tenacious quality in human beings. Most of us don't realize how stubbornly life clings to us, especially with the cement of hope to strengthen the bond. When the rescue expedition finally lands, they'll discover two shrunken mummies here on the floor.

"They'll think we perished. Then someone will discover that deep down in those wasted bodies is still a spark of life. They'll go to work on us and pull us through. It'll be close, I'll admit, but we'll make it."

He turned away cheerfully and began to unzip his bulky space suit before putting it on.

"Might as well trot out and make a few observations," he said. "This is really a wonderful opportunity for me to correlate some of my observations and strengthen a few of my pet theories. Well, keep your chin up, Jackson."

He vanished into the air-lock. Presently the *Meteor* trembled slightly to the thud of the outer port slamming shut.

Jackson sucked in a long, shuddering breath. He brought his clenched fists around from behind him and put them on his knees, now that Thorne was no longer around to see their trembling. His haunted eyes avoided the black disk of the forward port, fearful that he would see the grimacing specter of death grown bolder now, beckoning through the glass.

Six or seven weeks! Food enough for three to four weeks. Three to four weeks for two, but six to eight weeks for one. Two men eat twice as much food as one man. Twice as much food lasts half as long. . . .

ABRUPTLY the idea was born in Jackson's mind. Spawnd by the laughing demons of his thoughts, they fought their murderous way to his consciousness.

Thorne must die!

For a moment Jackson was surprised at the calmness with which he accepted the thought. But then he realized that he had always hated Thorne—hated and feared him. He had hated him because Thorne was a scientist, a delicately tuned and maddeningly efficient instrument of research. And he feared Thorne because the man was never afraid.

Jackson had never belonged on this expedition. He was no scientist, not even a mathematician beyond the barest fundamental requirements of astrogation. He was one of the last of the old school of pioneer rocket pilots, daredevils who had opened the spaceways to traffic by their blind, heedless, pit-of-the-stomach and seat-of-the-pants astrogation.

They had pointed lumbering, fragile old rockets at the Moon. Missing their blind objective by millions of miles, they had unwittingly opened the farther planets to exploration and settlement. For the most part, those men had died or retired by the time science had taken over the new frontier of space travel and made it subject to schedules.

But Jackson had never really belonged to that crowd, either. For Jackson was a coward. All his life he had been afraid. Most of the crazy, desperate, sensational things he had done in the past had been done accidentally,

the result of blind, panicky flight from something he feared.

Fear had made him Thorne's assistant on this flight to chart the nearer galaxy. There had been a scandal in Swamp City on Venus. Money had been stolen by a man who feared poverty worse than he feared possible capture. A guard had died. And suddenly Jackson's fear of the death penalty was greater than his terror of the unknown beyond the Solar System. He had leaped at this job with Thorne as an escape.

So, as always, fear drove Jackson on from a lesser to an even greater terror. So Thorne must die because Jackson feared the gnawing pangs of hunger and the nearness of that hovering death.

Jackson stood up quickly, strengthened by his resolve, and went to the port. A turn of the thumb-screw brought the disks of polarized glass into co-ordination, restoring its transparency. Jackson looked out over the weird, phosphorescent landscape of Viar, with its jutting of knife-edge mineral rocks and its towering cliffs and mountains.

Directly below the port, he could see a corner of their food chest, imbedded in the sandlike metal dust. When the crash had ruined their refrigeration plant, Thorne had suggested leaving the food chest outside in the cold of airless space to protect its contents against mold. Not a single familiar life-form inhabited dead Viar. So there was no danger of loss by stealth.

Jackson stared at the visible corner of the black impervium chest until his eyes watered. How damnably, pitifully small it was! Yet under its air-seal lid was a man's life—and a man's death.

HE TURNED away and swept his gaze over the bleak land until he saw the moving dot of Thorne's space-suited figure on a hummock a quarter-mile away. Thorne had set up a maze of strange instruments on that hummock and spent most of his time there, taking readings and observations. He was about through, Jackson saw from the movements. He would be starting back at any moment.

Thorne must die quickly, before his

useless body consumed any more of the precious food. But he must die in such a way that the rescue party would not suspect murder. Jackson's brow wrinkled, then smoothed. His fear-sharpened animal cunning had discovered the way he was seeking. It was utterly simple and absolutely certain! Hurrying, Jackson crowded his big, hulking body into a space suit. Fear kept him from venturing outside as often as Thorne, but he was familiar with the technique of locomotion on so small a world. He stood poised for a moment on the narrow step outside the airlock. Then he leaped out at an angle to carry him clear of the footprints left by Thorne.

On airless Viar, footprints would last through eternity to rescue or damn. There was no puff of wind to smooth their casual outlines, nothing to destroy their telltale presence. Jackson knew this, not because he had figured it out for himself but because Thorne had told him so. Thorne was a scientist who knew such things. Jackson had neither the time nor the interest.

He floated down, touched the soft ground and ballooned skyward again. He had forgotten about the lack of air pressure or gravity. But he compensated quickly, frightened, turning the gravity control on the spacesuit's belt to adjust his body to normal weight. His untrained fingers overcompensated at first, and the force of nearly two gravities crushed him against the ground. But he terrifiedly found the proper setting and rose to his feet. Then he marched out across the weird landscape, paralleling Thorne's footprints.

Half-way to the hummock, he found what he wanted—a knife-edged metal rock lying loosely on top of a larger boulder. He picked it up and went on. Plodding up the rising grade until he topped the crest, he halted not ten feet from where Thorne bent over his meters.

Jackson's lips peeled back in a snarling, savage grin. Everything was working out perfectly. He had the idea, the convenient rock, and now Thorne stooped in exactly the right position.

He raised the knife-edged rock, sprang across the intervening distance and brought the deadly edge down with

all his brutal strength. It struck the space suit, bulging out rock-hard from the internal air pressure, directly between the metal brace-ribs. Jackson could hear no sound. But he could see the long rent appear in the fabric of the suit, could watch the edges puff out a little from the pressure of escaping air.

THORNE jerked erect, spun clumsily. His eyes stared wide and horror-filled through the glassite port of his helmet. For a moment his arms milled wildly, trying in futile fury to reach and close the deadly leak between his shoulderblades. Jackson stood back, waiting impassively, still holding the murderous rock.

It was over with shocking abruptness. Thorne stopped his useless attempt to close the gap in his suit. He took a single stiff-legged step toward his murderer. Then he went down, collapsing like a Venusian fishman out of water, as the last of his air whipped away into airless space. He was dead when Jackson at last summoned enough courage to bend over his prone figure.

Thorne was dead, and it was over. Jackson would now live in comparative comfort until the rescue ship arrived. He lifted the dead man's shoulders gingerly and wedged the sharp rock beneath the body. Setting it down into the soft ground with its edge upward. He fitted it into the rent in the suit.

It would look exactly as though Thorne had fallen backward upon the imbedded rock, ripping his suit and dying there beyond human aid. Jackson, when the rescue ship finally came, would be too weak to go outside. The others would readily accept his story that Thorne had been alive until almost the end, had gone out while weak from starvation and that Jackson had lacked the strength to go to his rescue.

Laughing quietly, Jackson worked his way back to the half-buried *Meteor*. As he moved backward, he carefully smoothed away every trace of his own footprints. Back at the ship, he felt a return of the old familiar panic. Vague, formless terrors, a fear of things unknown, unseen and impossible, came back to haunt him.

He ran clumsily to the food chest and lifted its unlocked lid. Suppose something had happened!

But nothing had happened. The carefully packed food was there, snugly fitted into its impervium chest, waiting to supply a murderer with life in exchange for the life he had taken.

For a moment Jackson felt a great surge of exultation at his success, his cleverness in outwitting death. Then the exultation died, its flames extinguished by the cold breath of terror.

Panicky, he caught up the heavy chest and staggered with it to the airlock. Suddenly he was not able to bear the thought of leaving the precious store of food out of his sight, no matter how sure he was of its safety.

Back inside the cabin, he relaxed in the warm glow of the radiation bulbs. With his space suit off and the protecting walls of the tough hull close about him, the sharp edge of his terror dulled a little. He even managed to forget that death waited outside the ports, its army augmented now by the addition of a new recruit.

He cursed viciously. He knew what had made him jittery. He was hungry. It had been nearly five hours since he and Thorne had last dipped into that chest for a skimpy meal.

He would eat heartily. There was no longer the horrible urgency for husbanding the supply. Then he would sleep. Eat and sleep—that would be the pleasant pattern of his life until help arrived. Eat and sleep!

Jackson caught the handle of the food chest, and lifted. It resisted his efforts, though it had flipped up so easily outside. He swore irritably and nervously looped both hands around the handle and jerked. Muscles swelled across his powerful shoulders. Veins stood out on his temples and perspiration rolled into his bulging eyes.

By not so much as a hair's-breadth did the stubborn lid yield to his fury.

He yelled curses that echoed back at him from the mocking walls and snatched up a lever bar to use as a pry. The bar bent under his frantic lunges but the lid held as if it had been welded. He put two bars together and leaped on them. The bars held, but the slender metal handle of the chest had been crys-

tallized by the intense cold outside. It snapped off sharply, and there was no more leverage.

Jackson screamed, and the salt sweat on his tortured face was mingled with salt tears. He slammed the lever bars against the impervium chest until his numbed hands could no longer endure the sting of the blows.

"Damn you!" he shrieked. "I know what's wrong. You're holding it down. I can see you there, big and black and laughing at me. You're dead! You wouldn't stay outside any longer. You came in here to trick me!"

He snatched the loosened pilot's seat and shattered it against the implacable chest, followed that with every other movable object in the cabin. When there was no longer any usable implement, he fell down upon the wreckage and clawed at the mocking crack between lid and case until his fingernails broke off.

After awhile he checked his fury. Laying his head upon the cold black surface of the chest, he began to laugh softly. The laughter rose and fell for a time, and then died away.

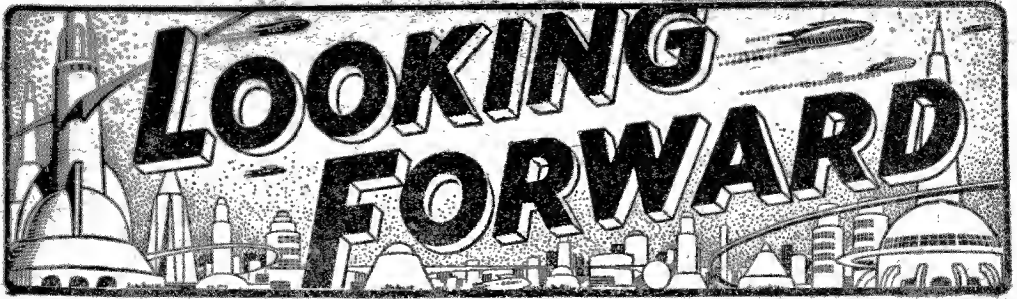
LIEUTENANT Slane of the Space Guard gasped, forty-two days later when the rescue expedition landed.

"Thorne up there on the hill and Jackson in here! Thorne died of a ripped suit and Jackson apparently went mad at the prospect of starvation. It's horrible!"

"Lieutenant," one of the younger Guards said, "I can't get this food chest open. We don't know if they ate up all their supplies or not."

"Take it outside, you dope," Slane said irritably. "There's probably a vacuum inside, from being opened in the vacuum outside, where there's no air pressure. They probably kept it out there to stay cold, and all the air inside it must have escaped. Naturally you couldn't open it here, against normal Earth air pressure."

"Don't you remember the old Magdeburg Hemispheres they showed you in physics class at school? Creating a vacuum inside sealed 'em so tight, they couldn't be pulled apart. Take the chest outside, and a baby could lift that lid up!"



SCIENCE'S preview of the year 2040 indicates a Futureland where pedestrians will practically vanish from the streets.

Locomotion will be effected in many curious ways, engineers predict. For instance, the populace will go down into large subways provided with moving sidewalks and moving benches. These benches will be supported in the air, perhaps by alternating current magnets, and be pushed forward by further magnetic forces.

The closed cars used in the subway today will have disappeared from underground transits, and the electric railways, as we know them, will have been relegated to the museums.

Automobiles of graceful design will be driven silently through the streets at an enormous speed. They will travel less than 10 inches above the surface and will be wheel-less. The same power which drives all other mechanisms in Futureland will serve to operate these cars—magnetic or atomic energy.

There being no wheels and no bearings, there is no more question of friction and no more problem of spring suspension. The only friction encountered will be the air. Magnetic force will take care of the weight of the car and other magnetic forces will drive the streamlined car forward over fixed routes.

These suburban and interurban cars will travel at speeds of 250 miles an hour!

1,000 MILES FOR A CENT!

There's nothing like good American \$ & ¢ to illustrate the comparative distances of astronomical bodies.

Suppose we had a celestial taxi that would take us places at the rate of one cent a thousand miles. That sounds cheap—but wait!

At this rate we could go round the world for a quarter. To the Moon the fare would be \$2.38. The fare for a journey to the Sun would be \$930. The distance of the nearest star is about 26 billion miles. The fare there would be \$260,000,000. And the taxi-driver would retire!

WANTED: PERFECTION

Want to win everlasting scientific fame? It's simple—if you can invent the perfect thermometer.

At present, it is a physical impossibility to construct a perfect thermometer. Even at the National Bureau of Standards, in Washington, where one would naturally expect to find only absolute accuracy, the best thermometer that human science can produce shows an error of at least one-twentieth of a degree.

Indeed, the early thermometers of Galileo, Fahrenheit and Celsius must have been

crude affairs, for it is a long cry from the uneven, imperfect tubes of their day to the smooth-bore, finely graduated modern thermometers.

But the present instrument needs perfection. And if you can do it, you may even get your picture on a postage stamp.

MAN FOR SALE

What is man worth? An average man, one hundred and fifty pounds of him?

It's simple enough to figure it out. Thirty pounds of carbon are equal to fifteen cents' worth of coal; fifteen pounds of hydrogen—well, that's water. Ninety-five pounds of oxygen and four of nitrogen aren't worth anything—they're free as the air. The ten pounds of calcium phosphate bring thirty cents as fertilizer. The seven ounces of table salt are worth two cents. That leaves four ounces of sulphur and three of potassium; two drams of iron; a few copper pennies; and a dash of magnesium, iodine, bromine, boron, manganese, etc., just enough to constitute slight impurities.

In terms of the elements of which he is composed, a man is worth about a dollar.

THE MENTAL MARVEL

Is there such a thing as the perfect photographic mind? Don't jump to conclusions until we tell you about the prodigious mental feats of the world's wizard lightning calculator, Johann Martin Zacharias Dase, born in 1824 at Hamburg.

Multiply 79,532,853 by 93,758,479? Dase could give you the answer in 54 seconds. Find the product of two numbers each of twenty digits? Sure, but wait 6 minutes while it's worked out mentally.

There were a lot of other amazing feats this mental giant could do in his head. He once extracted the square root of a number of hundred digits in 52 minutes. When he

was sixteen-years old he calculated the value of pi to 205 places of decimals. Dase's next achievement was to calculate the natural logarithms of the first 1,005,000 numbers to 7 places of decimals; he did this in his spare time.

Dase's remarkable memory could permit him, after a single glance, to state the number (up to 30) of books in a bookcase, sheep in a flock, etc. After a second's look at some dominoes he gave the sum (117) of their points; asked how many letters were in a certain line of print chosen at random in a quarto page, he instantly gave the correct number (63); shown twelve digits, he had in a half a second memorized them and their positions so as to be able to name instantly the particular digit occupying any assigned place.

We wonder if Dase could have remembered the necessary telephone numbers one has to refer to in our complex civilization!

FAMILY NEWS!

It's been a big month for our tribe of science-fictioners. The office Walter Winchell reports that Robert Bloch has middle-aided it. . . . That the Leo Moreys have increased the population with a baby daughter. . . . That Otto (Anton York) Binder has stepped to the altar with a Chicago lass prettier than any of his heroines. . . . And that his artist brother, Jack Binder, is anticipating a blessed event. . . . Congratulatory wires, flowers and space cruise tickets will be gratefully acknowledged.

AMATEUR CONTEST NEWS

WANTED—new writers! Each month the editors of **THRILLING WONDER STORIES** read scores of stories by fantasy followers in a hunt for new talent—fans with stories interesting enough to merit publication in T.W.S. So far seven amateur scribes have rung the bell. Their stories have been featured in previous issues.

Why don't you enter this national contest, limited strictly to amateur writers? If you have an idea for an original story, dress it up in narrative form and let us see it. Write up that pet interplanetary theme you've been hoarding all these seasons before some professional author scoops you on the idea and beats you into print with it. Type it up, double-spaced, and send it to **AMATEUR WRITERS' EDITOR, THRILLING WONDER STORIES, 10 E. 40th St., New York City, N. Y.** Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope for the return of your manuscript should it prove unavailable.

If your story is a fairly good one, we will be glad to publish it. If your story is in need of revision, our editors will make suggestions. And if you show any ability at all, we're always glad to furnish encouragement. So try us out, even if you've entered a manuscript before. Prize stories are purchased at the same rates paid our staff contributors.

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You're not a full-fledged scientifiction fan unless you own a membership card in the

SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE. Thousands of science-fictioners the world over belong to this active, international organization devoted to fantasy fans' fraternization. Get five friends in your neighborhood to join the **LEAGUE** and form your own Chapter. Write for full details.

To obtain a **FREE** certificate of membership, tear off the namestrip of the cover of this magazine, so that the date and title of the magazine show, and send it (along with the application appearing on this page) to **SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE, 22 W. 48th Street, N. Y. C., N. Y.**, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

And readers—write our Sergeant Saturn a regular monthly letter. Tell him which stories you liked best, which are your favorite features and artists. Your suggestions and criticisms have made T.W.S. scientifiction's leading magazine. Help us maintain that leadership.—**THE EDITOR.**

LEAGUE CHAPTER NEWS

GOLDEN GATE COMETEERS

Mr. J. J. Fortier, at 1536 39th Ave., Oakland, California, announces the formation of the Golden Gate Cometeers, a branch of the **SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE**. At present, the club's membership is eight. Readers of **THRILLING WONDER STORIES** residing in Oakland, Berkeley, Martinez, San Francisco, and other bordering cities, are invited to communicate at once with Mr. Fortier if they are interested in joining this Chapter.

Meetings are held on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month at 7:30 sharp. Particulars and meeting place will be given upon request.

FOR MINNEAPOLIS READERS

Paging Messrs. Jack Knight and Jack Gordon, both of Minneapolis, Minn.!

Will both these League members get in touch with Mr. John L. Chapman Miske, head of the Minneapolis Chapter of the SFL? His address is: 1521 Como Ave., S.E., Minneapolis, Minn.

NEW MEMBERS

UNITED STATES

Wilfred C. Pagot, New Orleans, La.; A. L. Schwartz, Dorchester, Mass.; Arthur L. Joquel, II, Los Angeles, Calif.; Ralph Morton, Los Angeles, Calif.; M. Thomas Corti, Long Is-

(Concluded on page 127)

SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE.
10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y.

I wish to apply for membership in the **SCIENCE FICTION LEAGUE**. I pledge myself to abide by all rules and regulations:

Name
(Print Legibly)

Address Age

City State

I am enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope and the name-strip from the cover of this magazine (tear off name-strip so that the name **THRILLING WONDER STORIES** and the date can be seen). You will send me my membership certificate and a list of rules promptly.

2-41.

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STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933, of Thrilling Wonder Stories, published monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1940. State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared **H. L. Herbert**, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of Thrilling Wonder Stories, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: Publisher, Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.; Editor, Harvey Burns, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor, none; Business Manager, **H. L. Herbert**, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. 2. That the owners are: Better Publications, Inc., 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y.; **N. L. Pines**, 22 West 48th Street, New York, N. Y. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are none. 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds or other securities than as so stated by him. **H. L. Herbert**, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 9th day of October, 1940. **Eugene Wechsler**, Notary Public. My commission expires March 30, 1941.

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 13)

The remaining three shorts were rather poor—but here they are, anyway: "Blonde, Time Machine and Johnny Bell," "World Upside Down," "Exiled from Earth," 5, 6, and 7 respectively. I just happened to remember how much I miss Jack Binder's work.

You have a contents page, so why fill the cover to overflowing with printed material? Straighten out the title, too. Where are those full-page framed pics?

I'm sorry you did not print my remark about placing "Upward Bound" in second place in that issue; I thought it a most novel and different development of plot. It was preceded only by a yarn of greater length and a master story-teller.

The continuity in themes that is so prevalent in T.W.S. is another reason for my unremitting purchases of that mag despite childish covers and untrimmed edges and frequent poor stories. Wellman's "petal-pussed" Martians, Hamilton's future "history," the Via crews, etc., all seem like old friends. Speaking of Via, will they go to the remaining five major planets, the asteroid belt, and the mythical Vulcan and Planet P?

The August (month) cover poll shows T.W.S. tenth out of twelve and in September sixth out of nine covers printed. It looks even higher this month, although there was very little of great interest this time. A reader says that Bergey's people are stiff—a better word is two-dimensional. Glad to hear of newcomer.—New York City.

So you think space-rony Hamilton's novel would make fine flicker fare? You've got something there, Pilot Hildy, and if enough of us wrote to the movie moguls in Cinemaland, or something, you can bet all ninety-two elements that we'd have more scientifilms.

Bless your heart, lad, but I also hope the "Via" series go on and on, like perpetual motion. Gordon Giles televisions word that his intrepid band of spatial pioneers explore Jupiter in his next trilogy, which I hope our editor schedules for early arrival. He's an old space-hound himself, incidentally, and if he had his way he'd be horning in on all those solar jaunts with Gilway, Markers, and the rest.

Continuity in themes? Call it chain-belt suspense, but you'll have to search all nine worlds and twenty-eight moons before you can find any finer series than those the helmsman behind T.W.S. has been serving you so far. Tubby... Pete Manx... Gerry Carlyle... Tony Quade... the "Via" gang... they're all part of our space-voyaging family. And you'll be seeing plenty more of all of them. You can lay to that!

And now let's dig down into the old mail-sack for some more sonic-gab. Here's a new recruit to our crew—Kiwi Wilfred C. Fagot:

FIRST REPORT

By Wilfred C. Fagot

This is my first letter to any stf mag, and the first thing I want to do is congratulate you on your stories. I can truthfully say that I have never been disappointed in a single issue of your magazine. Congratulations!

I have been a reader of stf for about five years and I have got more entertainment from T.W.S. than any other mag. My only kick is that the **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS DEPT.**, **SCIEN-TIFACTS**, and **THE READER SPEAKS** should be enlarged.

I am a student of physics and chemistry, a

(Continued on page 122)

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THE READER SPEAKS (Continued from page 120)

radio "ham" (radio amateur station W5IBD), a member of the Junior Science Academy of New Orleans, and several other organizations of science. I am also interested in nearly every other science, and I find that THRILLING WONDER STORIES gives me complete entertainment in each and every field of science. I live and work and think and dream in science and it sure is perfect entertainment to me to read scientific fiction.

I would like very much to correspond with other T.W.S. readers such as Sam Peebles and T. H. Richter, two Texas fans whose letters appeared in the November issue. I would appreciate it if these Texans or any other fans would correspond with me, and I would also appreciate it if the editor would publish my street address along with my letter so that they may do so.—530 S. Solomon St., New Orleans, La.

Welcome to the tribe, peegot. And that goes for all you other radium fuel-stokers. There's plenty of room in the old Sergeant's space-log for more frequency data and data, so if any of you haven't yet carved your handle in our Inky Way let's have your first report by return rocket. Warp my hair and call me Kinky, if I won't be glad to have your blasts help propel this battered space-can along her galactic patrol.

You just keep watching that mailbox, lad, and Uncle Sam's couriers will be bringing you a few cubic feet of letters from T.W.S. pen-pals before you can say Lorentz-Fitzgerald Contraction.

Blast my jets, but here's a rocketeer who struck paydirt in our last contest. Meet a champ, you junior pilots.

CONTEST WINNER

By Don B. Thompson

Myohmy; THIRD prize in the "Impossible Highway" contest! I can tell you I am waiting very anxiously for that Finlay original, which hasn't arrived to date. First prize letter is quite adequate.

This letter will have to cover two issues of the magazine—November and December, so here goes:

First, the covers. They are almost photographic, as far as the people and animals go. They are still a little lurid, and the printing is rather prominent, but the December issue shows improvement in this respect, also.

Of the stories, "The Day to Come" is the best in either issue. It fits in with the modern trend in science fiction toward stories which can be enjoyed by readers who are not regular fans. "Gift From the Stars," while definitely a fan's story, is almost as good. It is much better than most of Hamilton's recent novels, I think. I also especially enjoyed the following, listed in order of preference: "The Life Machines," "Reverse Atom," "The Golden Barrier," the two "Via" stories, "Shall Stay These Couriers," "Exiled From Earth" (because of the ending, mainly) and Harrison's Amateur story. Least liked was "The White Brood," but perhaps it was mostly because of the illustration, which got me off to a bad start on that one.

The "Via" stories still hold up amazingly well. Giles' Mercurian Intelligences are reminiscent of, but astonishingly different from Weinbaum's famous Oscar. Ley's article is a fine addition to T.W.S. Something comparable every month, or every other month, would be appreciated. "The Reader Speaks" continues to improve, considerable credit being due Anderson for this.—2032 U Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Cut your rockets, Pilot. That Finlay prize has already been dispatched to you, and by

now the masterpiece should be adorning your den. I don't wonder that you felt as though you'd stepped on a comet's tail because that original was belated in arriving. You ought to drop in on our art editor next time you make a space-hop to New York, skipper. The Paul, Finlay and Wesso black-and-whites that bedeck his office would make your orbs pop out like one of Bergey's monsters.

Congratulations for winning, son. And there'll be another contest soon for all you other ray-gun slingers.

Speaking of ray-guns, here's a singeing volley from Carl H. Anderson, our severest critic. He covers the covers—and how!

FROM COVER TO COVER

By Carl H. Anderson

"Listen," said my fan-nephew a couple days ago, "if you hate this magazine so, why in the green depths of Hades do you buy the darned thing?"

That seemed odd to me, because I like T.W.S.

But it is not perfect either, as the grudging experiments with the cover prove, and the clamor of the fans seems gradually to be breaking the editorial torpor. The outer jacket has just been the one malodorous phase of the mag that I have harped on, and that doubtless is the origin of neftoo's mistakenly generalized opinion.

The promise of a new brush-twirler on the front door next month induces me to spare the horses a little this time, though I can't suppress a few remarks that leap to the tongue at sight of the latest Bergstrosity.

Basically Brownian in conception, the December effort is closely reminiscent of Oct. '39 and any of several overpopulated BEM covers since then. And this monster's peepers bug with the louisiest of them. Why?—why in the name of all that is sacred in science fiction do they have to hang out so?

Then too, there is the oft-argued point of whether or not four arms are practical. If they were more practical than two, then we would have four, unless the anti-evolutionists are right. This is Wellman's fault of course; Bergey couldn't very well contradict the story. But the whole thing is vastly interesting. Topping all, perhaps, is the fact that we have a perfect mechanistic robot that, in spite of an utterly materialistic mind, still has the modesty to wear a sarong!

Charles Hidley has given you the key-note: out with juvenile prittle-prattle and in with lots and lots of good, eye-filling scientific artwork. We have promise of something new for January, and if it is good, the December issue may well mark the end of an era—the final, end-product of the magnificent, persevering, humanitarian SFTPOBEMOTCOSFP!

THE READER SPEAKS sounds off this month like a clarion bell in the silence of the wilderness. Not a single letter drools!

Chuck Hidley says I'm silly with my attitude toward Brown. You may be right, Chuck. You and D. B. Thompson are the best story-analysts the mag has, so your opinions should be worth something. If I was wrong in blaming Brown, then that blast should have been directed at the editor, for he's the one who made Brown do those hideous things.

As for my wordiness—if more of those words had been spoken by more people sooner, we wouldn't have had to endure such blige as the lamentable first effort by E.K.B. on the Sept. ish—we would have been spared watching the antics of Brown's famous Green Men that have infested the fronts of both Startling and Wonder on and off for the last year—we would never have seen Clark Stanton's peach-blonde dream-girl complete with negligée, frantically trying to hammer her way to freedom on the Feb. number.

The George Washington Bridge would never

(Continued on page 124)

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(Continued from page 123)

have fallen to the fury of Zarz, the overgrown Triton in July, nor the Capital to Kuttner's Beast in April—and the unspeakably juvenile R. Z. Gallun interlude that played to a packed Yankee Stadium under a red sky would never have found its way onto the March issue. If wordiness can deliver us from such as those, then I say let words fly to the four winds.

The conclusion of Giles' Mercury trilogy is the best of the three and one of the strongest G.A.G. has ever done. Topping even "Flight of the Starshell," "Via Intelligence" wins hands down in the Dec. race.

Trailing some distance behind this we find "The Life Machines" with Wellman's robots hiding discreetly behind their skirts, and beyond it Hamilton's novel. The rest sink disconsolately in the rear—the rear-most being the Tubby flub-dubberty.

I could split hairs here and say that since this was a guy-falls-asleep-and-dreams-screwy-adventure story it was therefore fantasy and had no place in a science mag such as Wonder. But I don't have to. "World Upside Down" has no place in any mag, science fiction, fantasy, or the South Dakota Plumber's Guide.

Harrison's amateur venture was better than a couple of your tyros have done, but there were two or three surprise twists he could have given the thing and didn't. With them it would have been high entertainment.

Without them the pot just simmered. This chap does dialogue well and in other ways looks promising, but Brudy's "Dosage" will never be displaced from the top of the amateur heap by stuff like "The Blond, the Time Machine and Johnny Bell."—Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.

Cosmic centrifuges and Pluto's perihelion if a B.E.M. won't get you if you don't watch out, lad. Mark this grizzled space-hawk's words, but wait until the first space ship comes back from Venus with a cargo of bug-eyed interplanetary denizens. The what-its the Lindberghs of space bring back to terrestrial climes will be sporting optic appendages that project way into the fourth dimension, and you'll be salaam-ing before Masters Bergey, Brown, and Co. for the rest of your service, my lackey, begging their forgiveness for ever doubting their visualization of other-world creatures' vision accessories.

And somewhere in Tibet the loyal clan of the SFTPOBEMOTCOSFP will erect a mile-high statue of a B.E.M., cast out of melted-down Willkie buttons, that will knock your eye out. So there! Besides, what in all combustion would you blast about if the editor decreed a moratorium on protruding-orbed entities?

By the bye, Pilot Anderson, I don't get your wave—or rather, your signature. How about appending your John Hancock to one of your letters? This old space-buzzard doesn't mind being brickbatted, ever, but it's out of the torpedo hatch for all anonymous missiles—and unsigned ones. And how about an address—street number and all that? It's as clear as space you can write, lad, so tag your next ethergram, or you can look for your future letters in our Martian editions.

The mail-sack's not yet empty, the X-ray scanner informs us. Here's good news in

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NEW STAR ON HORIZON

By Joseph Gilbert

It is with great pleasure that I announce the publication of the South's first and only fan magazine, **THE SOUTHERN STAR**.

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FROM THE STAR PORT, a column by Fred W. Fischer.

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THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL. A unique department featuring analyses of the handwriting of prominent fans.

THE MUNSEY MASTERPIECES. An excellent and different collector's column.

THE PASSENGER LIST. A department of Southern biographies.

This in addition to many other features, such as **MUTANT** articles, a swap column, a round robin department of a new order, and a well-balanced assortment of articles, fiction, verse and departments.

Our staff artist is Harry Jenkins, new to the fan field, and destined, in my opinion, to be one of the biggest sensations of the coming year.

The first issue of **THE SOUTHERN STAR** will appear January 15, and subscription rates and other information can be obtained at my address.—3911 Park Street, Columbia, So. Car.

That reads like a star-studded line-up, Pilot Gilbert, and the fan-mag reviewer on **STARTLING STORIES** should rate your journal four stars if your publication is as good as it sounds. Best wishes to **THE SOUTHERN STAR**, and may she shine brightly in our constellation of fandom's press.

Pardon my velocity, rocketeers, but I'll have to be reaching for the next spacegram. Well, dip me twice into the Red Spot of Jupiter if it isn't another fan magazine announcement. If this ink-slinging fever keeps up, the three non-editing fans will join the Army and then you'll all be editors.

FOR AMATEUR SCRIBES

By George Wetzel

At the present time I am publishing a fan mag devoted to the writings of aspiring amateur-writers. I feel that this mag will have a definite function in fan circles as there are many writers that are just waiting to be discovered. But not only will I print the scripts of tyros but an article about fantasy-fiction writing along with them as well. In some instances I hope to use articles by editors of science fiction mags on the same subject—the tricks of s-f writing.

Here, however, is where I aim one below the belt, so to speak. Would you consent to making me a present of several original s-f illustrations which you use for **THRILLING WONDER STORIES** and **STARTLING STORIES**? I understand that a few other fans have obtained some pics free from pro editors for use as prizes in amateur contests. You see, I don't think that I would be out of order in suggesting such a thing as others have done the same. Myself, I intend to use them for one purpose and only one purpose. That is for prizes in amateur contests which I am featuring in my mag—**THE UNIVERSAL HOUND**. If you are doubtful about such a transaction, please let me refer you to Mr. Frederick Arnold Kummer, Jr., the advisor of the mag, who will tell you that I am on the up and up.

I wonder if you could mention the fact that I am on the lookout for amateur scripts in the readers' column of either **THRILLING**

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RIES?**

Hope to hear from you soon concerning
these various matters.—3108 Woodland Ave.,
Baltimore, Ohio.

That's a mighty fine project you're plan-
ning, lad, and long may **THE UNIVERSAL
HOUND** rove the spaceways. Sure wish I
could accommodate you with those original
illustrations, but you caught your old Ser-
geant a few momentums past your orbit.
All our surplus pics were donated at the
Chicago World Convention, and our art di-
rector hoards what few are left for forth-
coming contests like a Martian hoards his
water rations.

Say a hearty hello to Fred Kummer for
me, lad, and I'll be dipping the wings of this
meteor-scarred craft in his direction next
time we scoot over his port. Let's see the
first issue of your mag and maybe if it's
good enough we can defrost the absolute-
zero heart of our art ed.

Thought we had that "left wing" faux pas
on the cover of the last issue all straightened
out and put away into suspended animation.
But here's another backfire from Pilot Bill
Carlton, proving that two lefts don't make a
right. You'll have to stop off at the next
port, lad, and consult last month's issue for
the answer to your digital dilemma.

LEGERDEMAIN WOES
By Bill Carlton

The November issue of T.W.S. was surpris-
ingly good. I was agreeably shocked and
surprised when I saw the cover. For a mo-
ment I thought I had bought the wrong mag-
azine, but a second glance reassured me.
"Well," I thought, "maybe they've given Ber-
gey his walking papers. I don't see any green
men or bug-eyed monstrosities squirting out-
landish contraptions at each other." But of
course it was Bergey, as who else but that
half-wit would draw a man with two left
hands? Examine Davolio and you'll see that
I'm right. Of course, there had to be a
squawking female in distress, this time with
a terribly vicious vegetarian Brontosaurus
trying to take a chunk out of her arm. It
wouldn't be T.W.S. without that. On the
whole, however, the cover was much better.

Here is my rating on the stories. First,
"Via Catacombs," with a characteristic that
has always appealed to me, realism. You al-
most find yourself on Mercury with the ex-
pedition. Second, the novel with no other
reason except the fact that it was a novel,
and boy, do I like 'em. Third, "The Tomb of
Time," just pretty good. All the rest were
fairly good with the exception of "A Snare for
Tomorrow," which was definitely putrid. Al-
though no particular story stands out, the
issue was well above the T.W.S. average and
far above the rest of the stl. mags. Keep it
up. T.W.S. has the best stories and depart-
ments (and some of the punkest artists) in
the field.—Grapeland, Texas.

Which brings us, not to the bottom of
the mail sack, but to the last bit of space
for rocket fuel. So, pull in your necks, you
spectators, and seal the airlocks until next
month. We're blasting off for another trip
on the old run. Your old sergeant is going
to try to bring back some sparkling gems
from the far places for the next issue or so,
and you junior pilots can help brighten up
the sparklers by sitting down and writing
a message that will make a few sparks fly.

After all, you know, this is distinctly
your department—in a y e compartment

would suit a space ship better—and when you don't kick in with letters into which your chief astrogator can sink his teeth, there's no purpose in my wasting a lot of time and type just to fill up space. Occasionally I note a complaint from a few of you grumblers about the quality, or lack of quality, of your own letters. Blast me, if that doesn't win the pair of astral long drawers, comet-lined!

Is your editor to blame for that?

Yeah, you know the solution. Sit down and do your growling in black and white—and shoot your beefs in. So I can have something to snap back at.

Until next issue,

Your chief pilot,

—SERGEANT SATURN

LOOKING FORWARD

(Concluded from page 119)

land City, N. Y.; Samuel A. Peoples, El Paso, Tex.; Robert Callies, Cicero, Ill.; Mildred Jung, Hilsdale, N. J.; Ann Craig, Bremerton, Wash.; Carmine Margiasso, Riverdale, N. J.; Gereaux de la Ree, Sr., Westwood, N. J.; Jerry Keeley, Hendersonville, N. C.; Harry Plotkin, Westwood, N. J.; Montague Craig, Bremerton, Wash.; T. R. Richter, II, Pearsall, Tex.; Bud Reynolds, Oxford, Ohio; Roger G. Ireland, Denver, Colo.; Richard Blossom, Pt. Pleasant, N. J.; Phil Davis, Columbus, Ohio; William B. Minto, Dartmouth, N. S.; S. G. Travers, Sacramento, Calif.; Richard Braley, Cincinnati, Ohio; Albert Klein, Los Angeles, Calif.; E. Terrible, New Orleans, La.; Billie Mills, Macksville, Kans.; Alfred Cummings, New Orleans, La.; Troy Dunson, Roanoke, Ala.; Ray J. Sienkiewicz, Scranton, Pa.; Harold Bertram, San Francisco, Calif.; Ronald Lemar, New York, N. Y.; Frank Motsenbocker, Edgewood, Tex.; Norman Strand, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Bob Burkart, Mt. Dora, Fla.; Lee Walters, Manhattan, Kans.; Richard Post, E. Chicago, Ind.; Jerome E. MacDonald, Newark, N. J.; Louis Brenner, Portland, Ore.; B. E. Hunt, Sullivan, Ind.; Lloyd E. Snapp, Ft. Monmouth, N. J.; Tom A. Flowers, Jr., Binghamton, N. Y.; Norman Dial, Wellston, Ohio; Earl Brown, Burley, Idaho; N. Feder, New York, N. Y.; E. Earl Biefeldt, Thornton, Ill.; Frank J. Sellers, Cleveland, Ohio; Jerome Keeley, Hendersonville, N. C.; Donald Long, New Orleans, La.; Larry Shea, Ann Arbor, Mich.; Robert J. Allen, Athol, Mass.; Richard Homerhaus, Evansville, Ind.; Richard Gordon, New York, N. Y.

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THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY



ONE of these days (far off, we hope), after Miss Gerry Carlyle has filled all the vacant cages that line the interior of the London Interplanetary Zoo, Captain Tommy Strike will write us her biography, "Beauty and the Beasts."

Until that day rolls around, however, we'll have to depend on Arthur K. Barnes for authentic chronicles of the space-queen's exploits. That lad has an exclusive monopoly on the Bring-'em-Back-Alive dame's memoirs, and not even Tony Quade of Nine Planets Films, Inc., can muscle in.

And you'll find out, as Frank Buck and the Martin Johnsons learned centuries before Gerry Carlyle, that catching interplanetary monsters alive is as simple as counting Saturn's moons. It's *keeping* them alive that calls for super-resourcefulness, and determines whether the hunter will be kept dead or alive.

At any rate, here's the official lowdown from Barnes himself telling how he came to write **TROUBLE ON TITAN**, the novel featuring Gerry Carlyle that starts off this month's issue. This way, lad-eez and gentuhl-men, to the greatest show on Earth! Hurry, hurry, hurry!

Like most stories of considerable length, **TROUBLE ON TITAN** is the compound of several ideas. Chiefly, however, it's the result of two ideas.

The first of these comes from Frank Buck himself, a gentleman in boots who has achieved some success as an imitator of Gerry Carlyle. Mr. Buck also writes, and in his writings I came across a brief article which discussed the most difficult phase of his profession.

Believe it or not, catching 'em alive is infinitely easier than keeping 'em alive once they're caught. Creatures of the wild, whether from Africa or Venus, seldom thrive in captivity. To maintain their health, it is necessary for the captor to study in great detail their habits, likes and dislikes, etc.

This need for thorough knowledge of a hunter's specimens, and the possibilities of disaster if the rule is ignored, was one of the ideas around which my yarn is built.

The other springs from the fact that my father is interested in insect pest control, especially among citrus orchards. Even a casual survey of the woes of raising oranges brings one face to face with the pestiferous ant, who does more financial damage in a year than a flock of Nazi bombers.

The ant, as some readers may know, has

129

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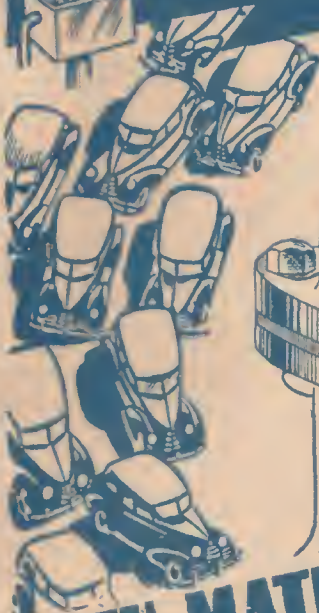
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